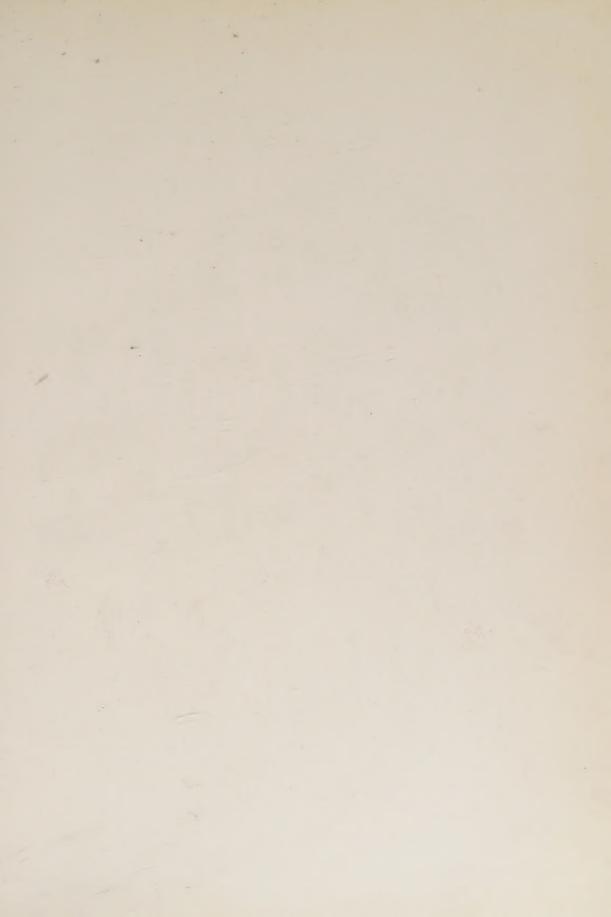
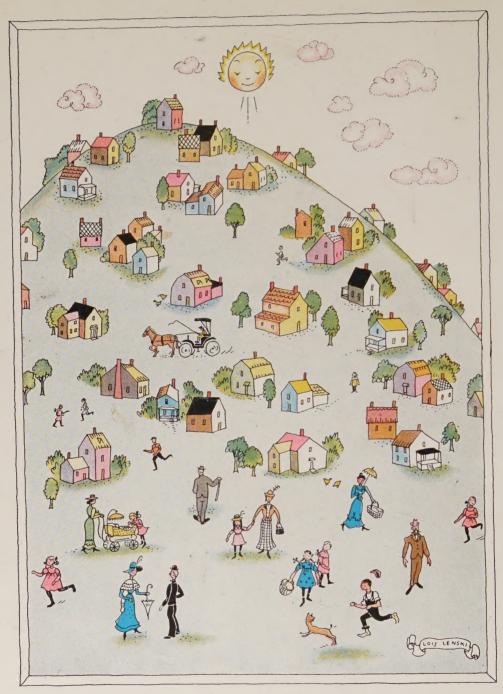


SKIPPING VILLAGE









"OH, I KNOW A TOWN, A FUNNY LITTLE TOWN."

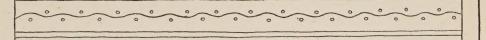


A Town Of Not So Very Long Ago

Written and Illustrated by O Lois Lenski



Oh, I know a Town, A funny little Town, That sits on the top of a Hill; For years it has sat In the very same spot, And I know it is sitting there still.



FREDERICK A. STOKES CO. New York 1927



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Fourth Printing, August 16, 1938

Printed in the United States of America

DEDICATED
to the
Memory of
my
MOTHER

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CHAPTER															PAGE
I.	THE TOWN	Ι.		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	I
II.	SPRING .			•	•	•	•	٠.				•	•	•	17
III.	House-Cle	EANIN	1G		•		•			•	•	•	•	•	25
IV.	PNEUMONI	IA .		•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	35
V.	MAKING G	ARDE	N	•		•	•					٠.		•	43
VI.	SUMMER									•		•	•,		53
VII.	GRANDFATH	HER'S	F	ARN	Л	•				•	•	•		•	65
VIII.	FISHING			•	•								•	•	79
IX.	FOURTH OF	JUL	Y	•	·•	•			•	•	•	•	•;	•	87
X.	SUNDAY				•				•	•	•	•	•,	•	IOI
XI.	SCHOOL.			•		•	•	•		•				•	III
XII.	AUTUMN			•	•			•			•			•	123
XIII.	House on	FIRE			•		•				•	•		•	131
XIV.	WINTER			•		•				•			•	• ,	139
XV.	CHRISTMAS	S .		•		•			•	•	•	•		•	153
XVI.	THE KITCI	HEN		•			•	•	•		•		•	•	161
XVII.	MAIL-TIM	Ε.								•	•		•		173

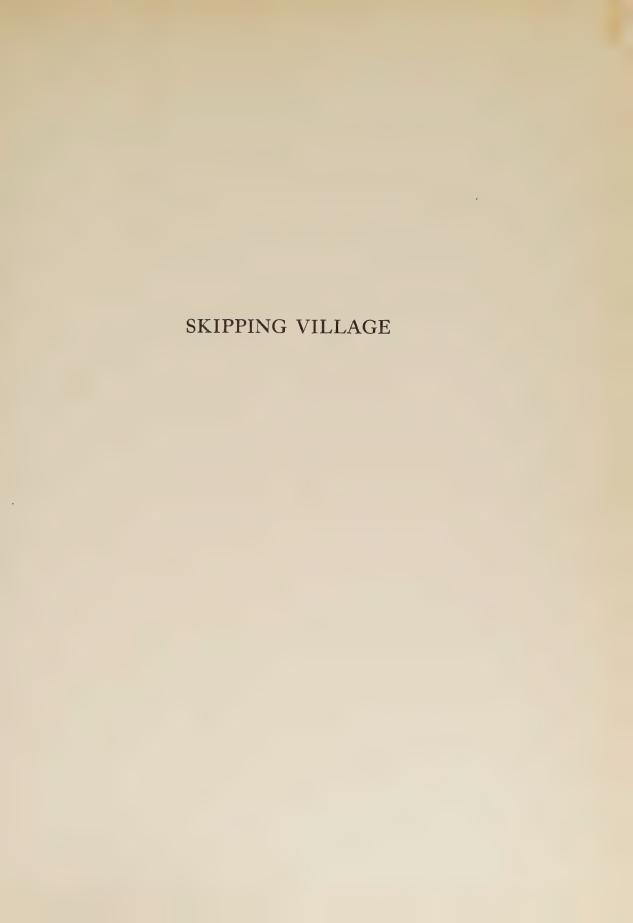




ILLUSTRATIONS

"Oh, I know a Town, a funny little Town" (in colors) Frontisp	iece
"Not far from the church corner, on the little side street, there stood a white house with red trimmings"	4
"Before Mother had time to tie Pet up to the hitching-post, Polly and Ruth were in Grandmother's arms" (in colors)	70
"Mrs. Brown took a huge blue coffee-pot in her hand and began to pour the steaming coffee"	92
"The yard was filled with odds and ends of furniture, some rocking chairs and lamps and bedding which had been rescued hurriedly" (in colors)	136
"Watkins road at the other end of the town was very steep, so it was ideal for coasting"	146
"In another moment, Frank arrived, breathless, with the mail bags" (in colors)	174







Chapter I THE TOWN

OH-HO for a Town
That never slides down
From the top of a hill so high!
Oh-ho for the sun
Who smiles just for fun
While the clouds go scampering by!





Chapter I THE TOWN

NCE there was a Town by the name of Greenhill. It had sidewalks to walk on and lamp-posts to light at night. It had back yards with chicken-coops and clothes on the line and front yards with the grass smoothly cut. It had fences with gates to swing on and trees to climb.

The most important street in town was called Main Street, because that's where all the shops were. The other streets didn't seem to have any names, or if they did, no one knew what they were. At one end of Main Street was the church with its tall steeple and the graveyard. Then came some houses and the townhall and all the stores, with the grain-elevator and the depot down at the end where the trains passed through. The schoolhouse was on a back street, perched on a hill.

The rest of the town was made up of houses for people to live in. Every single house had its own family, except one or two, which happened to be empty when somebody moved out. Some families were big and some were little. Sometimes just one person lived alone in a house, like little Miss Chipping, who was an old maid and played the organ in church.

Not far from the church corner, on the little side street, there stood a white house with red trimmings. It was a curious shape, with a steeply pointed gable above a little balcony. It had two porches, one in front and one on the side, very tall narrow windows,

and a flower-bed in front of the bay-window. There was a large apple-tree near the side porch, a lawn-swing under it, and a hitching-post out in front.

In this house there lived a little girl whose name was Polly James. She was eight years old and had blue eyes and wore her hair in two brown pig-tails with ribbons on the ends. Besides Polly, there were Ruth, six, also with pig-tails; John, eleven, with freckles on his nose; and Father and Mother, whose proper names were Mr. and Mrs. James.

On most days, Mother wore blue gingham aprons in the house and a blue sunbonnet in the garden. But when she dressed up, afternoons and Sundays, she was the most beautiful lady in town. Father had a mustache, a gold watch in his vest pocket and always wore spectacles to read the evening paper. Every day Father had to go away to work very hard, and Mother had to stay at home to work very hard, but sometimes she visited the neighbors to pass a pleasant afternoon.

One Saturday afternoon, Mother sent Polly to town with a big market-basket and a list of things to buy. Ruth had to go along, too, because she always went everywhere Polly went. They walked slowly to the corner while Polly read the list aloud: "One pound of Arbuckle's coffee, one box of rolled oats, one box of Arm and Hammer soda, one spool black thread No. 50, one dozen sweet rolls. . . ."











"Oh, goody!" interrupted Ruth. "They're for Sunday breakfast! I wish it was morning right now."

When they reached the corner they waved their hands to Mother, who was still standing on the front porch. Then they turned into Main Street, with the basket swinging between them, their brown pig-tails flying in the breeze.

Mrs. Clinker lived in the tall, thin, brown house that looked as if it were ready to tumble over. She was out hanging up clothes, as usual. She seemed to be always hanging up clothes, no matter what day of the week it was. But when she saw Polly and Ruth she came to the gate to ask them if they were well and whether Mother had been to the meeting of the Sewing Circle yesterday.

Mrs. Clinker's voice was high and shrill because she had to use it so much calling one or the other of her eight children. She had a very busy time of it looking after them all, but she was never too busy to stop her work and have a little chat at the gate with any one who happened to be passing by.

Mr. Bangs lived in the yellow house across the street. He was out cutting grass in his front yard. Mr. Bangs had such a loud, booming voice that it made Polly think of thunder.

"I hope he won't look this time," she whispered to Ruth. "He shouts so loud, it always scares me." But, sure enough, at the very last minute, when they thought he hadn't noticed them at all, he turned and boomed, "Good day, young ladies!" The girls nodded and hurried on.

Farther down the street, Mrs. Wicks was sweeping her front porch. Mrs. Wicks was fat and had a soft, gentle voice and stopped her sweeping long enough to call, "Why, hello, Polly! Hello, Ruth! How are you to-day?"



NOT FAR FROM THE CHURCH CORNER, ON THE LITTLE SIDE STREET, THERE STOOD A WHITE HOUSE WITH RED TRIMMINGS.



Soon the girls reached the busy part of town. It was Saturday afternoon, so Main Street was filled with surreys and piano-box buggies and farm-wagons. All the country people had come to town and all the stores were crowded. Mrs. Jeremiah Sandifer's phaeton, with its fringed canopy top, was tied in front of Mr. Bowser's butcher-shop.

Polly and Ruth walked slowly up the street, chattering happily. They stopped to examine the big red Indian in front of Mr. Duffy's cigar-store. They took a peep into Bunny Allen's barber-shop to see how many farmers were being shaved. They counted the stripes on the red-white-and-blue barber-pole out in front.

They passed Mr. Perkins' drugstore and saw Mrs. Fox and her four children, who lived in the country, eating ice-cream at a table. Arabella was having cherry phosphate instead of ice-cream. They stopped for a moment to admire the enormous bottles in the window, filled with delicious-looking liquids in brilliant colors.

They looked at the spelling-books and kegs of nails in P. W. Jones's hardware-store window. They examined a brand-new plow standing just outside the door, and laughed at the distorted reflection of their faces in the shiny mold-board. They stopped at the post-office and asked for the mail, although they knew very well that there couldn't be any until the train came in after five.

They lingered in front of Mr. Raddle's photographic studio and studied the photographs displayed in the glass case, to see who had been having their pictures taken lately. They wandered on to the depot and listened to Tom Murphy telegraphing, click, click, clickety-click. They pretended to buy tickets at the little ticket-window.

"I'm going to buy a ticket for Cincinnati," said Ruth.

"Oh, I'm going much farther than that," said Polly. "I'm going to New Orleans to see the Mardi Gras, like Father and Mother did!"

They stopped at Miss Tompkins' window and criticized all her hats. They chattered idly about the kind of candy they liked best, and wished for a penny to spend.

They said "Hello" to all the people they knew. And they made up names of their own for the people they didn't know. They tried to guess where they lived and how many children they had and wondered where they all got so much money to spend.

Finally they stopped in front of the big window of Buddle & Biggs's General Store. This window was filled with many things to tempt people to come in and buy. A pair of slippers, lovely patent-leather, with shiny silver buckles, just the right size for Ruth. A lady's hat; several bolts of calico and gingham; a pair of felt boots; a pyramid of canned tomatoes; chocolate-drops in a large red box with paper lace on the edges; a horse's bridle; a bag of chicken-feed; a bright-red fascinator—what neverending variety!



"I do like Mr. Buddle's window, don't you, Ruth?" exclaimed Polly.

"Oh, yes!" cried Ruth. "If I had all the money in the whole world, do you know what I would do? I'd buy those beautiful patent-leather slippers and all those chocolate-drops! What would you buy, Polly?"

Polly studied long and carefully.

"Well, this time I think I'd buy some of that blue-and-yellowplaid gingham for a dress. Blue and yellow are my favorite colors, and I'd like to have it made like Ethel Simpson's and trimmed in—"

Just then they were startled from their dreaming by a loud noise in the street behind them. They turned quickly, and the window with its fascinating treasures was forgotten.

A horse came galloping down the street, with a rickety springwagon rocking madly behind him. A terrified boy, with his coat flying, pulled desperately on the lines, but the horse galloped harder than ever. A crowd of people crossing the street flew in all directions. Men began to run, shouting at the top of their voices.

In a moment the quiet street was in a bustle of confusion. People dropped everything and ran. Others stood still and held their breath. The runaway horse swerved to one side of the street and the wagon almost toppled over into the gutter, but righted itself quickly as the horse turned abruptly in the opposite direction.

Polly and Ruth ran with the others as fast as their legs could carry them. Small boys appeared from all directions and shouted, "Horse running away!"

Mrs. Fox and her children left the last of their ice-cream untasted and hurried down the street with the crowd.

Several men rushed out to grab the horse by the bridle, but they only frightened him the more, and he shied violently, dragging the wagon up on the sidewalk and banging it into the barber-pole. A wheel came off and went rolling into the gutter, but the wagon went bumping on. The boy dropped the lines and hung on to the slanting seat with both hands. Still the horse galloped and still the crowd of shouting people followed.

Down by the depot Mr. Warner was backing his big lumber-wagon away from the grain-elevator. A whistle announced the sound of an approaching train. The jangling signal-bell sounded and the gates went down. Just in time, for the runaway horse was fast approaching the tracks. He stopped suddenly, nearly throwing the boy from his seat, then, frightened by the whirl-wind of the rushing express, swerved sharply to the left and bumped heavily into the rear of Mr. Warner's lumber-wagon.

The bump was enough to stop him completely. He stood bewildered for a moment, long enough for Bunny Allen and several



other men to grab him by the bit. The boy, thrown from his seat into the dust, was picked up, very white in the face, but luckily unhurt. He looked around at the crowd sheepishly, and to cover his chagrin, he exclaimed, as soon as he could get his breath, "Gee! that was some ride! Didn't know old Jip had it in him! He'll be nineteen years old next month. What'll Pa say when he sees the wagon got busted? Wonder where I lost my hat?"

It had all happened so quickly that by the time Polly and Ruth reached the spot, the horse was unhitched and being led off to the livery-stable, limping and shivering with fright. Several men were busy helping to put the wheel back on. The runaway boy was the center of an excited group, everybody asking him questions and no one giving him any time to answer.

"Why, it's Jimmy Norcross, from the farm next to Grand-father's!" said Polly, when she was able to get a peep at him through the crowd.

"Is he killed?" asked Ruth.

"Oh, no! He's all right," answered Polly. "I heard him



say that his horse got scared at a well-driller that he met along the road and galloped all the way into town. He said he never came to town so quickly in his life before! He's laughing about it now!"

"But he wasn't laughing when he went whizzing past Buddle & Biggs's when we first saw him," added Ruth.

Suddenly the excitement was over and the crowd scattered, every one talking about the runaway horse. Polly and Ruth remembered that they had been sent on an errand, and, realizing that it was a long time since they had left home, hurried back to Buddle & Biggs's store.

The store was crowded again. Mrs. Jeremiah Sandifer was leisurely examining some brilliant-colored dress trimmings. Several farmers' wives were waiting with baskets of eggs and butter to exchange for groceries. A man was looking at a horse-collar hanging above the pickle-barrel. More people were coming in at the door.

Finally Mr. Buddle took Polly's list and filled her basket. Mr. Buddle was in a great hurry, as he always was when there were customers waiting. He reached for a long stick and began to poke at a box of rolled oats on the top shelf. Plop! Down it fell right on his bald head and knocked his spectacles off the end of his nose. Mr. Buddle laughed as much as the girls did, and was glad he had his glasses tied to a string.

Polly and Ruth had to take one last look at Mr. Buddle's window before they started for home. Then they began to run.

"Oh, let's hurry, so we can tell Mother all about the run-away!" they cried.

Mother was on the front porch waiting for them.

"Why, chickens," she said, "I never knew you to stay so long! I thought you had got lost, or had run away or—"

"Oh, Mother, it wasn't us! It was a horse!"

"It was Jimmie Norcross's horse and it got scared at-"

"And a wheel came off; I saw it rolling-"

"And we ran as hard as we could-"

"And Jimmie was knocked off into the road—"

"And he lost his hat—"

"And Bunny Allen grabbed him-"

"Well, well, what's all this excitement about?" asked Father, sticking his head out of his study door. And John appeared from around the side of the house to listen, too.

"It was Jimmie Norcross, and I know John would be scared to death to hold on tight like Jimmie did-"

"Aw, what are you talkin' about, anyhow?"

"Well, we saw a runaway and Mr. Warner was backing his team and wagon out from the grain-elevator—"

"And he bumped right into the barber-pole and almost knocked it over!"

"And his horse got badly hurt because it was limping dreadfully—"

"And they nearly got run over by the train!"

"Did Mr. Warner's horses get run over?"

"Oh, no, Father! Now don't get us all mixed up. He was backing his horses out and Jimmie Norcross's horse bumped right into his wagon with the wheel off and—"

"And Jimmie got-"

"And Bunny Allen unhitched him-"

"Unhitched whom? Jimmie?"

"No! Of course not!"

"How many got killed and taken to the horse-pital did you say?"

"Oh, quit your teasing, Father, or we won't tell you a single thing about it!"

"They took the horse to the livery-stable—"

"And he's almost nineteen years old! What do you think of that?"

"Who, Bunny Allen?"

"Oh! No! The horse, of course!"

"Well, let's go in and get supper and quiet down a little and perhaps we can get the story straight," suggested Mother.

"I bet I know just as much about driving a horse as Jimmie Norcross does, any day!" boasted John. "You girls make me tired!"

"I'll wait till supper's ready," said Father, with a wink, "and see how many dead ones there are by that time!"

At the supper-table, the story was told and retold after many questions. Father insisted that it wasn't exciting at all because nobody was killed. Mother agreed with the girls that Jimmie must have been a very brave boy to hold on so tightly and to laugh about it afterward.

John summed it all up by saying in disgust, "Well, I don't see anything wonderful about that! Anybody with half sense would have done the same thing. Let's talk about something else!"

And that reminded Ruth of the slippers with the shiny silver buckles, and Polly of the plaid gingham dress. Mother listened to their enthusiasms with a smile and agreed to everything.

Father came out in the kitchen, tied a blue gingham apron

around his neck and flourished a dish-towel gaily. And Polly had to give him a good scolding when he dropped a cup on the floor and broke it. Ruth stood on a chair and put things in the cupboard, and somehow or other before any one realized it, the supper dishes were done.

Tall people, short people,

Thin people, fat,

Lady so dainty

Wearing a hat.

Straight people, dumpy people,

Man dressed in brown;

Baby in a buggy,

—These make a Town!





Chapter II SPRING

And gaily sang his song:
"It's spring to-day, it's spring to-day!"
He sang the whole day long.





Chapter II SPRING

N the very first fine day of spring, the little town of Greenhill woke up from its long winter's sleep. Yellow and purple crocuses poked their heads up through the grass. The buds on the trees all seemed to burst at once. The first robin came hopping over the lawn, and the boys got to work on their bird-houses. Girls began skipping rope to the tune of "Salt, vinegar, mustard, pepper."

All the houses in town were turned upside-down with house-cleaning. Many of them blossomed out in a new dress in the shape of a fresh coat of paint. Mrs. Simpson always had hers painted white. Mr. Bangs chose a different color each time for his, so that people would be sure to notice it. Boys played marbles all over the sidewalks. On windy days they flew their kites out in Mrs. Bronson's meadow. Tulips bloomed in every yard. Winter coats were hung on the line to air. Windows were washed and screens put up.

One morning Mother brought up the subject of new spring hats at the breakfast-table. Father frowned and said, "What! New hats again?" And Mother said, "I think they really need them, dear." And John said, "Aw! Their old ones are good enough." But Mother didn't say anything else, and Polly and Ruth beamed and whispered, "Goody, goody!" to each other.

And when Father left they saw him slip some money into Mother's hand when he kissed her good-by.

As soon as dinner was over, they all got ready to go. Just as they were leaving the house, Mrs. Biddle from next door came running in to ask Mother to borrow her recipe for Angel Cake. And Mother had to hunt and hunt, and she just couldn't seem to lay her hands on it, but finally she did. And Mrs. Biddle didn't notice that Mother had her hat on and was all ready to go out, but just stood and talked and talked, and told all about her grown-up daughter away in Chicago and her daughter's latest illness and all the doctor's remedies and many other things.

Then all at once, Alice, who was Mrs. Biddle's little girl, came rushing in, shrieking at the top of her voice, "Oh, Mamma, come quick, the prunes are burning!" And that was enough to get her started, so off she ran as fast as she could. It was a pity she was so stout and couldn't run still faster, for when she got home the smoke was pouring out of doors and windows and the smell was dreadful. And Alice told Polly the next day that the prunes were burned to nothing at all, and she was glad of it because she hated prunes so terribly.

Finally they started, and it did not take long to reach Miss Tompkins' Millinery Emporium, even if they did have to stop and talk a while with Mrs. Wicks on her front porch. Miss Tompkins was so surprised and pleased to see them and greeted them with smiles at the door. Miss Tompkins was long and thin and bony and wore her hair drawn back very tight with a large knob on top. She always dressed very plainly in black, but every one admitted that her opinion on the latest styles in hats was not to be questioned.

Polly and Ruth were very much excited by the sight of so many beautiful hats all around the room, some standing up on sticks on tables, and others, more expensive, in glass cases. They went running around from one to the other exclaiming, "I like this one." "Oh, Mother, do buy me this one!" Until Mother said, "Girls, do be quiet!"

Ruth was first. She sat down on a straight-backed chair in front of a swinging mirror and Miss Tompkins brought out the hats to try on. What an array! Big hats, little hats; blue hats, pink hats; white leghorns, yellow straws! Each one more beautiful than the last, and each one exquisitely trimmed. Plain ribbons, checked ribbons; quills, feathers; bows, streamers, knots! Ruth began to try them on and liked them all. In a few moments she found one that suited her exactly.

"Oh, Mother, can't we get this pink one? I like it much better than any of the others! And you know I always wanted a hat with streamers, and I like pink much better than any other color."

Ruth put it on and walked about the room, studying the effect in all the mirrors. Mother and Polly and Miss Tompkins all agreed that the chosen hat was very pretty and very becoming to Ruth. So Mother told Miss Tompkins she would take it, and it was carefully put into a paper bag.

Then came Polly's turn and she took her seat in front of the mirror. One after another she tried them on. A blue one with a white crown. But Polly did not like the shape. A yellow one with a crinkly edge. Too much like Ethel Simpson's last year's hat. A white leghorn with flowers. Much too babyish. A red straw with a quill. But Polly hated red. A brown one with yellow ribbons. Too dark to wear with white dresses.

Finally Miss Tompkins said that she had no more to show, and perhaps if Polly were not so particular . . .

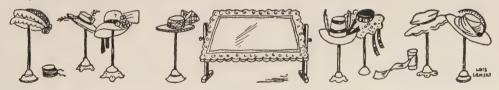
Mother picked up the very first one that Polly had tried on, the blue straw with the soft white crown and feather ornament made of ribbon. Mother suggested that it would go nicely with Polly's best dress. Miss Tompkins added, "Yes, indeed, it would." But Polly said she didn't think it becoming. Then Mother said it was exactly the color of Polly's eyes. And Miss Tompkins added, "So it is." But Polly said she didn't like the shape of it.

By this time Mother was getting tired and so she said that Polly might still wear her last summer's hat. That made Polly change her mind very quickly, especially when she saw Miss Tompkins putting all the hats back on the shelf.

"Oh, Mother, I think I do like the blue one, after all! Won't you please get it for me? You see, there were so many to choose from, and it's hard to tell which one you like the best, when you like them all so much— Please, Mother! And I'm sorry if I was too particular and made such a lot of work for Miss Tompkins."

In another moment the blue hat was in a bag, and Ruth carried hers and Polly hers, and they started for home. But when they came to the door they were surprised to find it raining.

"Who would have thought of rain on such a bright sunny day?" asked Ruth.



"April showers are good for May flowers, but not for new hats," said Mother with a smile, as she went back into the store to borrow an umbrella from Miss Tompkins.

As they started out the rain was coming down in gentle drops, "not enough to hurt a cat," as Mother said. But soon it began to rain in earnest, and people in the streets started to run for shelter. Mr. Watson stopped his horse in front of the drugstore and put the side-curtains on his buggy. The wind began to blow and tried to snatch Polly's bag from her hand.

As they came to the corner they saw Mrs. Clinker running to take the last of her clothes from the line. She ran up the side porch with the clothes-basket and called to Mrs. James to come in and wait for the rain to stop. When she saw Polly and Ruth with their paper bags she smiled and said, "I see you've got your new spring hats!"

By and by the rain slackened and the wind stopped blowing, but Mrs. Clinker kept on talking. She seemed to find so much to talk about, how many eggs her chickens laid, and how bad her husband's father's rheumatism was, and who had been to church on Sunday morning and who had stayed at home. Then Dicky, who was in the house somewhere, started yelling at the top of his voice, and when she started to go in to see what was wrong, Mrs. James got the chance to say that she must be going.

The sun was shining brightly by the time they reached home, and John and Frank Jones were out wading in the gutter. Polly and Ruth almost forgot their new hats in their eagerness to take off their shoes and stockings. John had a knife with two blades and he whittled and whittled and turned out more splendid ships a minute than any other shipbuilder ever did before or since. Alice

Biddle, from next door, Polly's very best friend, was never allowed to go in wading because her mother was very particular about her and was afraid she might take cold. But she came out with her raincoat and rubbers on and watched the fun.

In the evening after supper Father insisted upon seeing what they had bought. So they tried on the new hats in front of the mirror, and everybody thought they were beautiful, including Mrs. Biddle and Alice, who came over for the event. Father said, "What vanity!" and when Ruth asked Mother what he meant she just smiled and said nothing. And John had to be sent out of the room because he laughed and made fun of Polly's "chicken feather," as he called it.

My hat is pink,
Your hat is blue,
Mine has ribbon,
Yours has too.
Mine turns up,
Yours turns down,
Quite the finest
Hats in town!





Chapter III HOUSE-CLEANING

CLEAN the house in springtime
With a rag around your head;
Scrub the windows, scrub the ceilings,
Beat the mattress and the bed!
Never mind about the family,
Pull the pictures from the wall!
Was there ever such excitement?
No one knows the place at all!





Chapter III HOUSE-CLEANING

None of the very nicest days in spring, when Polly had walked home alone from school and the softness of the air and the blueness of the sky had put a little song into her heart, she opened the door and found Mother in the midst of house-cleaning. It was a jolt; it made her feel queer inside; and yet she couldn't explain to Mother. She couldn't say, "Oh, why do you have to spoil the beautiful day?" But her thoughts must have shown in her face, for Mother said, "Why, darling, I thought you always liked to help Mother." And she answered, "Of course I do," and somehow when she had changed into her play dress, and put on her big working apron, she felt better and the little song in her heart began again.

What grand and glorious confusion house-cleaning was! All the tacks to be taken out of the carpets and a strange man to beat them out on the lawn, windows to be scrubbed and rubbed till they shone, mattresses and bedding aired, all the pictures taken down and the furniture shoved about until no one knew the place at all.

There was so much to be done that Mother always had to get Mrs. Daisy to come to help. Mrs. Daisy was black and had ten children and lived on the hill behind the schoolhouse. Her two oldest children were quite old and were married, with children of their own. The younger ones were all girls and made a regu-

lar procession of black-eyed daisies of all ages and sizes. They all wore their hair in little short black braids sticking out in all directions.

Mrs. Daisy came every week to do the washing for Mrs. James. She always spoke in a soft, gentle voice and ate her dinner in the kitchen. Mrs. James liked to have her help with the house-cleaning because she worked so well and got so much done and never made a fuss about it. She loved to scrub, no matter what—floors or windows or anything.

Polly liked to curl up in a chair near-by and watch her work, and the two of them never seemed to run out of conversation.

"Why do you like to scrub, Mrs. Daisy?"

"Lawsee, chile, scrubbin's mah middle name! Ah was bawn a-scrubbin', an' ah specks ah'll die a-scrubbin'!"

"Don't you ever get tired of scrubbin', Mrs. Daisy?"

"Well, no, not 'zactly what you'd call tired, but jes' a mite wore out sometimes, an' when night comes ah'm usually pretty glad to tumble in! You see ah'm not as young as ah used to be!"

"Why aren't you as young as you used to be, Mrs. Daisy? Do you know what Mother says? When I ask her how old she is, she always says 'as old again as half,' and so she must be only half as old as she used to be, don't you think so, Mrs. Daisy?"

"Don't ax me, chile; ah don't know a blessed thing 'bout that. All ah knows is, ah'm gettin' old an' rusty in mah joint, and ah specks ah'll be layin' mahself down in mah grave, one o' these fine days."

"How many dolls has Annie got now, Mrs. Daisy?" Annie was the one who was seven going on eight.

"Well, now, if ah can recollect the number eggszactly, ah'd

say hits about sixteen, countin' the one ah rescued from Mrs. Wat-kins' rag-bag when ah was doin' her mendin' t'other day."

"Sixteen! Why, Mrs. Daisy, she can't possibly take proper care of so many children as that. It would take hours to give so many baths!"

"Oh, don't you worry 'bout that, Polly. That chile o' mine don't bother much 'bout baths."

"How does she ever find clothes for them all?"

"She's not eggszactly perticlar 'bout clothes, either, ah guess! Them that has clothes, has 'em, an' them what's got none, goes without 'em. That's Annie's way."

"I'm afraid Annie is not a very good mother, is she, Mrs. Daisy? Now, I'm very strict with my children all the time. There's Priscilla, who takes cold so easily. I always put lard and turpentine on her chest and it makes her well at once. I learned that from Mother. And there's Samantha Jane—"

But just then John stuck his head in the door and yelled, "Good heavens, Polly, stop your talking and come and help a little!"

So Polly rushed into the dining-room, where John and Ruth were trying to take down the little sheet-iron stove. Ruth was on the top of the stepladder, holding on to the stove-pipe as tight as she could to keep it from falling. John was trying to loosen it



at the bottom where it was attached to the stove. He pulled and tugged and then gave a jerk, and down came the whole thing, bang! on the floor, and soot flew in all directions.

John said, "Just what I expected! All your fault, Polly! You can't ever come and help when you're needed. All you do is sit around and watch Mrs. Daisy and talk her head off. Now you can just clean up this mess, because I don't intend to have a thing to do with it. Besides, Mother told me to go and help the man beat the rugs."

So off he marched, and then Mrs. Daisy came in and said, "Never you mind, girls," and she cleaned up all the soot in a minute, and carried the stove up to the attic.

Just about the time that things were getting very exciting and confusion was at its height, Mrs. James called the children in to wash and have their supper of bread and milk, and then packed them off to bed. It was Friday night and Father was away on a business trip and had to stay overnight. It was very lucky for him to be out of the house at house-cleaning time, for he always hated it and got cross, so Mother was careful to do it every year when he was away from home.

On Saturday morning the fun began again bright and early and everybody together made the dust fly. Mrs. Daisy came and so did the strange man to beat more rugs. Even Alice Biddle from next door came to help, and she and Polly agreed that it was as exciting as could be. Alice had to beg and beg her mother to let her come, because Mrs. Biddle was so afraid of germs, and whenever she cleaned her own house she always sent Alice away to visit her grandmother. But this time Alice begged very hard and said, "You always had lots of fun when you were a little girl

and you won't let me have a bit. And if you'll only let me go, I'll promise very sure not to catch a single germ!" After an hour or so of coaxing, Polly came over and helped Alice coax. Then Mrs. Biddle got tired of saying "No," and said, "All right, just this once, and don't stay more than half an hour."

So Alice helped Polly carry all the winter coats down and hang them on the line, and there was the James family in a row—all but heads and feet. First Father's big gray ulster, and then Mother's fur cape with the standing collar, and John's brown overcoat with the plaid inside, and then Ruth's and Polly's gray ones, both alike, only one smaller than the other, and both with the bright red flannel lining that they loved so much because it was so warm and Christmassy!

And after they were hung in place, Polly said, "Let's pay a call on the James family. How do you do, Mr. James? I hope you're very well," shaking hands with the sleeve of Father's coat. And so on down the line. "How are you, my dear Mrs. James? I hope your children have recovered from the whooping-cough? Oh, they didn't? Measles instead. Oh, I'm so sorry to hear that, because it leaves them speckled, I've heard. No? Oh, yes, I see, here are your darling daughters. I hadn't seen them before. Dear Ruth and Polly, how are you both? I'm so relieved to hear your measles didn't leave you all speckled up. And your dear son, John! What a large boy he is getting to be, and he looks just like his father, doesn't he? And now I must say goodby, and I do hope you'll bring the children to come and call on me sometime."

And all the time Alice stood back and listened and giggled

and then she said, "Goodness, Polly, how can you think all that up?"

And after that, the strange man carried the mattresses out on the side porch and laid them over the banisters, and Polly and Alice took the carpet-beaters to beat them and the whisk-broom to brush the dust off afterward.

"Let's pretend that he's a big ogre that we've captured and that we're beating him to pieces," said Polly.

"Oh, no," said Alice, "I hate ogres, and I'm afraid of them. I'm going to sit on mine and play that he's a galloping steed and I've got to keep beating him to get to the castle in time to rescue my lady love."

"Huh, I don't think you've got much of a horse if you have to beat him all the time. Only old 'plugs' have to be beaten. A 'steed' would go like the wind when he felt the lightest touch of his master's hand on the reins! Besides, you're only a girl. You'd be afraid to ride a horse that galloped. And I'd like to know how a girl can rescue her 'lady love.' It's only men who have 'lady loves'—"

"All right then, I'll let it be an old 'plug,' " said Alice. "I'll play I'm in Uncle Charley's spring-wagon with Sam hitched up, and I can beat Sam as much as I like because Uncle Charley says he has a thick skin, and it doesn't hurt at all. It feels like tickling to Sam, and it keeps the flies from biting him. And I'm going to drive to the fair at Riverbend and see all the cows and pigs and fruits and things, and have a ride on the merry-go-round and buy some ice-cream-candy, five cents a stick."

"Well, that's better," said Polly. "I think I'll go along. I've

got Fred Hopkins' horse and rig from the livery-stable and I'm taking all five of my children, Priscilla, Samantha Jane, Genevieve, Beatrice and Susan. I've just been intending to give them a treat because they've all been quite angelic lately. I'm afraid, though, with two such slow horses as ours, we'll never get there till dark. It's eight miles, you know."

But they were not easily discouraged, and people passing the house looked up at the sound of the whacking blows and wondered how two little girls happened to be so absorbed in beating mattresses. Just as the old plugs were driving into the Fair Grounds a faint call was heard, "A—lice!" And then louder and louder, "A—lice, A—lice! It's time to come home now!"

And Alice said, "Oh, goodness, I hope it isn't more than half an hour, or Mamma won't let me come next year to help you clean house!" and ran off as fast as her legs could carry her.

Saturday evening about six o'clock Mr. James came home from his trip, and it was no wonder he thought that the James family was moving out, for all sorts of curious things were still sitting out in the yard; a pile of books, the little square table, the big parlor lamp and other miscellaneous things. He could hardly believe his eyes when he found everything so spick and span and shiny clean, and was ever so surprised to find the house-cleaning all finished and over with. Of course he had to be told all about it from start to finish and all the children shouted at once, until Father told them they would make him deaf if they kept on. And everybody forgot to ask Father about his trip, because the house-cleaning was so much more important.

And when Father began to look around and saw all the chairs and pictures and tables in new places, and the shiny windows and the fresh curtains, he exclaimed, "I'm sure the Jameses have moved out, because this isn't my home at all!"

And then he went upstairs to dress and pretty soon he couldn't find his striped tie or his bedroom slippers, and everybody had to go on a search for them—except Mother, who didn't have time because she was getting supper and it was late anyhow. John found Father's slippers mixed up with his school-books, and his tie turned up in the kitchen, and nobody knew how it got there.

And Polly said to Mother when she kissed her good-night, "I think it's nice to have a clean and shiny house on a lovely spring day, don't you, Mother?"

Oh-ho, for a house that is cleaned in the spring, Oh-ho, for the rugs that hang on the line; Oh-ho, for the mop and the old scrubbing broom, Oh-ho, for the joys of spring cleaning time!





Chapter IV PNEUMONIA

ILK and broth for Sick-a-bed,
Pills and powders too;
All day long kept right in bed
What can the poor child do?

Take your broth, Miss Sick-a-bed,
Take pills and powders, too;
All day long stay right in bed
As the doctor told you to!





Chapter IV PNEUMONIA

HERE were two doctors in the town of Greenhill—Doc Johnson, who lived all alone and never had any patients, and Doctor Jarvis, who did all the doctoring. Doc Johnson built himself a little square house, with only one outside door. Inside he had rows and rows of books reaching to the ceiling and a workshop filled with tools. He was queer and stayed at home alone most of the time, except when he went to the post-office once a day for his mail.

Doctor Jarvis, with his bay horse and his piano-box buggy, his smart clothes and his little black bag, was a familiar sight throughout the town and the surrounding country. He had a closely-clipped mustache and bright blue eyes that sparkled when he smiled. He had a grown daughter by the name of Virginia, with beautiful blond hair. She kept house for him in the big house by the church. He had a separate office building at one side of the yard near the alley. In the front part was the waiting-room, where you sat and smelled funny smells, examined the hundreds of photographs of babies that covered the walls, and wondered what the doctor was doing to the poor patient who happened to be in the inner office with him.

It was in the spring when Polly James got pneumonia. And it all happened because her school-teacher, Miss Gerald, took the class to the woods to gather wild-flowers. It was a long walk,

Pneumonia 37

across town, the full length of Stevens Lane and across Mrs. Bronson's meadow to Norcross' woods.

After a happy afternoon the children came trudging home with baskets filled with violets and trilliums, and other wild-flowers. Like the others, Polly was quite tired out, but she took time to plant all her flowers in her wild-flower bed by the dining-room door and watered them carefully before she came into the house for supper.

When she took her empty basket into the kitchen, she noticed for the first time that she did not have the long-bladed kitchen knife, which she had taken along to dig with. She thought she had left it by the flower-bed, so went out again to look for it. When she found it was not there, she started out to retrace her steps down the alley to Stevens Lane. Farther and farther she went, but she could not find the knife.

At home the family sat down to supper, expecting her to come in every minute. And then Father said, "I wonder where Polly is?" and went out to find her. John called out, "I think she went back to the woods to look for the knife she lost."

And Father said, "Why didn't you tell me before?" And he took his hat and hurried out. When he came to Bronson's meadow, he found a little girl huddled up on a stone crying in the darkness.

"Why, Polly, why are you sitting here crying?"

And then the story came out, how she lost the knife and came to look for it, and it got dark and she couldn't find it, and she didn't want to go home until she had found it and she was so sorry to lose it— Then Father put his arm around her and told her it was all right, and she must stop worrying and come home

or Mother would be anxious. Hand in hand they walked home. Mother was waiting for them with hot soup for Polly. And after Polly had been kissed and tucked up in bed, Mother told Father that her feet were soaking-wet.

The next day and several days after that Mother kept Polly in bed. Then one day Doctor Jarvis came with his little black bag and said that Polly was a very sick girl and must stay in bed. And when Ruth went in to see her, she just closed her eyes and turned her face to the wall and wouldn't even notice Samantha Jane's pretty calico dress.

The doctor left all kinds of funny medicines—little pink pills in an envelope and white ones in a round pill-box. Then there were powders in white papers which Mother stirred into a glass of water and which must have tasted dreadful judging from the face that Polly made when she drank them. That afternoon Mother wouldn't let Ruth come into the room, and from that time on for days and days she never saw Polly at all. Every morning at nine o'clock the doctor came and stayed a long time inside the sick-room with Mother. When he came out he looked very serious and didn't pull Ruth's pig-tails or even say "Hello."

Each day Ruth begged to go in and see Polly for only a minute, but Mother said, "No, dear, not until she is better."

So Ruth had to content herself with looking through the key-



Pneumonia 39

hole, and the only thing she could see that way was a part of the closet door and that wasn't very consoling. Day after day, she took her place outside Polly's door in the hall, huddled in a corner with a large family of bright-eyed doll-babies, Polly's precious five and three of her own, and played all kinds of games with them, never once talking above a whisper.

"I think it will be company for Polly, even if she doesn't hear us, darlings. And we won't disturb her for the world when she's so very ill, 'cause we want her to hurry up and get well quick. Now, anybody who makes the least little bit of noise will have to go and stand in the corner." So all her angelic children looked at her in awe, did exactly as they were told and never made a sound.

Every night when Father came home he went at once to the sick-room. Polly, even when she was at the worst, would smile at him and say, "Hello, Father!"

"That's a fine smile for a sick little girl," said Father. "Let me see if I haven't something in my pocket for her," and he pulled out a shiny new dime.

"Where shall we put it? Oh, here's just the thing, a little round empty pill-box. Let's see how many dimes and nickels it will hold—one for every smile that Father gets!" And it wasn't long until the little round pill-box was filled, and another one was found to hold the smiles.

Miss Gerald, Polly's school-teacher, was very unhappy over the serious outcome of the happy outing in the wood. So every day Mother let Ruth go to school at noon to tell Miss Gerald how Polly was getting along. And each day Mother told her just what to say before she started out. For it was true, as Ruth said in a tearful voice, "I'm never allowed to see her myself, so Miss Gerald will just have to take your word for it, Mother! When I get banomia, I'm going to insist upon having a visit from Polly and a visit from John every single day, and if I don't get it, I'll just die! You'll see if I don't!"

Then there were several days when Mother never left the sick-room at all, and Mrs. Daisy came and cooked the meals. Father sat silently at the table; his eyes seemed to have lost their sparkle, and he hardly spoke at all. John and Ruth felt very sad and uncomfortable and knew without being told that Polly was very, very ill. Doctor Jarvis came several times a day and often called at night. The whole house seemed like a strange place, and Ruth cried herself to sleep every night.

Then one day Doctor Jarvis came out of the sick-room with a smile on his face and patted Ruth on the head, and told her to cheer up. Mrs. Daisy went home again and Father began to joke and tease and pull Ruth's pig-tails. So Ruth collected all of Polly's dolls and stood them up in a row and told them how grateful they should be now that their own sweet mother was getting well.

The first day that Polly was allowed to sit up was on a Sunday when all the apple-trees were in blossom. Father lifted her out of bed and tucked her up in blankets in Mother's big armchair and then pushed her to the window. Polly sat there and watched the blossoms waving in the breeze, making lovely patterns against the blue of the sky. And a lump came into her throat when she tried to say, "Aren't they beautiful, Mother?"

She lay there very still watching them while the rest of the family ate their dinner, and the tinkling sounds of the dishes and

Pneumonia 41

the silver seemed to come from a dining-room miles and miles away. Then she heard footsteps coming nearer and nearer, and there was Ruth, with a broad grin, bringing her tray. And both the girls were too shy to say anything, but just smiled at each other.

After that, there were other days with Polly getting stronger and stronger and able to cut out paper-dolls and paste pictures in the old green scrap-book. And then she was up and dressed just in time to help Ruth with the tremendous task of providing a complete new summer outfit for all the dolls. Every afternoon, after Polly had had her nap, which Doctor Jarvis said she must take until she had regained her strength, she and Ruth spent many happy hours together. So it was not long until Polly was quite well again and able to play out-of-doors like the other children, and they nearly forgot what a sick girl she had been.

"Mother, Mother, I am ill, Send for the doctor on the hill! Doctor, doctor, shall I die? Yes, you shall, and so shall I!"

(Old Rhyme)





Chapter V MAKING GARDEN

HURRAH for barns, and alleys, too,
And gardens filled with weeds,
And spades and rakes and good black earth
And all the tiny seeds!





Chapter V MAKING GARDEN

HE town of Greenhill was a busy place in garden-making time. Old Mike was the most popular person in town because he had a horse and plow. Every family had a garden, and some were big and had to be plowed, while others were small enough to spade. There was a great competition to see who would get Mike first. Mrs. Clinker always spoke to him a whole year ahead and thought she'd be sure of getting him first that way, but she forgot what a poor memory Mike had, and could never forgive him for coming to her last. Old Mike seemed to have some system of his own which no one could guess, for he certainly never came to any one on the day they asked for him if he could possibly help it. But he always got around to everybody in the end if they were patient enough to wait for him.

It was Saturday when he came to the Jameses' and that suited John exactly, so he could be at home all day, and see that the work was done properly. John looked as much like a farmer as old Mike himself, wearing overalls and a big straw hat. Old Mike happened to be in a good humor, so he let John take the plow and showed him how to turn the corners square. After going around twice, John was red in the face and dripping wet. So he flopped on the grass and was quite willing to let old Mike go on with the work. It had looked so much easier than it turned

out to be. In less than an hour Mike had finished, and as a special favor John was allowed to have a ride on the horse's back all the way up the alley.

Then the whole family got to work. Father was home for the day, so he led the procession with a spade. Mother carried the rake, and Polly and John each a hoe, while Ruth brought up the rear with an armful of dolls.

Father started to sing his favorite hymn, "Work, for the night is coming," and soon the dirt began to fly. Polly had a way of lifting her hoe up as high as her head at every stroke and Father pretended to get cross because it kept her from keeping time with his singing.

Ruth was not old enough to be of much real help, so she found a comfortable seat on a near-by stone. She got a pan of water and some old lids and started a generous baking of mud pies.

In a very short time the ground was prepared, the lumps were smoothed out, and neat little beds separated by paths appeared as if by magic.

"Oh, goody!" exclaimed Polly. "Now it's time to plant the seeds. That's the most fun of all!"

She ran to the seed box and picked up a package of lettuce seed. In her haste to tear it open, she spilled half of it.

"Oh, Polly, that won't do!" said Mother. "You'll have to be more careful! Wouldn't you rather wait and let me give you seeds for a little plot of your own? Here is the very place for you." And she led her away to a small patch by the fence and told her how to get it ready for planting.

Polly went to get the hoe to begin work, while Mother and John planted the lettuce and radish seeds in the big garden. She

watched them for a few moments, to learn how to do it herself, then went back to her little patch. Ruth moved her family of dolls to a spot close by, so they could all watch Polly's progress.

Polly stooped over to pull up some tall grass growing by the fence, when, suddenly, she jumped back with a shriek, throwing her handful of grass high up in the air. Ruth dropped her mud pies and began shrieking, too, and both of the girls turned and ran as hard as they could to Mother.

"Why, Polly dear! What is the matter? What has happened? What frightened you so?"

Polly hid her face in Mother's apron and sobbed.

"Polly, what did you scare me like that for?" demanded Ruth. "What was it? I'm going to see!" And Ruth started boldly toward the fence.

"Oh, don't, Ruth, don't!" sobbed Polly. "Don't you dare to go near that patch! There's an enormous snake in the grass, all



curled up. And he was holding his head up in the air and sticking his tongue out at me!" And she hid her face in Mother's apron and cried as if her heart would break.

"I'll call Father," said Ruth, and she ran around to the other side of the barn where Father was emptying a wheelbarrow-load of trash.

"Oh, Father, come quick, Polly found a 'normous snake and I think he bit her, 'cause she's crying like everything!"

"What! a snake? Where? Who?" asked Father as he ran.

John and Father armed themselves with rocks and clubs and advanced toward the fence.

"Hey, Mr. Snake! Stick up your head, so we can have something to aim at!" called Father.

"I think you'd better go quietly and not shout, Father," advised Ruth, "or you'll scare him away."

"That's right," whispered Father. "Sh! Everybody.



Walk on your tiptoes, everybody, so Mr. Snake can't hear us. You go around on the outside of the fence, John, and I'll come up on the inside. And when we catch him, we'll keep him in a bird-cage for a pet!"

"He! He!" giggled Ruth. "Father, you are so funny!" And Polly had to dry her tears and smile too. It was a funny sight, Father with his straw hat on the back of his head, a large club on his shoulder and a handful of rocks in his hand walking on tiptoe and whispering, "Sh! Sh!" Polly and Mother could not keep from laughing.

John had the rake and began to poke the grass along the fence.

"Watch out!" whispered Father. "He'll jump out and bite your head off, John!"

John poked and poked, and Father got down on his hands and knees and looked and looked, but no Mr. Snake could be found.

"Polly, you were fooling us. 'April Fool's past and you're the biggest fool at last.' There's no snake around here anywhere."

"Oh, but I did see one!" protested Polly. "He was all speckled up with black and yellow spots—or maybe they were greenish—"

"See! she doesn't even know what color he was, so I'm sure she must have been dreaming. What a pity! Snakes make such nice household pets! And Ezekiel would have been such a nice name for him. And I just know he would have liked bread and milk for his supper!"

And Father walked away with an injured air.

Polly was sensible and went back to work in her little patch,

now that she was sure that the snake had disappeared. But Ruth removed her family to a safer place on the side porch and gave them a supper of mud pies. In a short time Polly was ready for her seeds. So Mother gave her just enough of each in a little saucer to make a row across her bed. Polly planned it all very carefully and left a row around the edge for a border of flowers which were to be planted later.

"I think I'll have roses and lilies in my border, Mother!" And then she carefully gathered enough stones for the edge, "to keep people from walking on it."

"Shouldn't I put up a fence to keep the dogs off, Mother?"

"Oh, no, I don't think you need to do that, dear, since the whole garden has a good fence around it."

In the afternoon, the work went on. Carrots and beets were planted in two long rows. Father and John set out the onionsets. Mother transplanted the cabbage-plants, and Polly watered them with her little sprinkling-can.

Father was very particular about having straight rows and stretched a long string very carefully between two stakes for a guide. He laughed and made fun of Mother's crooked rows, but Mother insisted that you could get more plants in a crooked row and that it didn't matter a bit! So Father's rows were always straight and Mother's rows were always crooked. And Polly summed up the whole situation by exclaiming, "What a good thing! Now we can always tell just by looking at the row, who planted it! I like Mother's best, because I think wavy lines are prettier than straight ones."

Later on in the spring there were other things to be planted; peas, spinach, corn for roasting-ears, tomato-plants to be set out,

pumpkins for Hallowe'en to be planted by the fence, and many other fascinating things.

But the flowers were best of all. Polly changed her mind about roses and lilies for her border and was quite content with nasturtiums and zinnias instead, and a row of morning-glories to climb over her part of the fence. After a little practice she soon learned to sow seeds nicely and evenly, instead of getting them all bunched in some places, and very thin in others. Every day she took her little green sprinkling-can and sprinkled her own patch. Sometimes when she was feeling very ambitious she filled it again and again and sprinkled the big garden, too.

There was great excitement on the day when the lettuce first began to peep up through the earth. And everybody had to run out to the garden and take a good look before they could believe it. Polly and John always went straight to the garden the minute they had changed into play clothes after they came home from school, and they were almost sure to find Mother there waiting for them. Pulling the weeds and keeping the ground loose with a scratcher was great fun, and later on, when the plants got a little bigger, John used the hoe and that was much quicker.

With such great care and interest, the plants couldn't help growing, of course. So it was not long before Mother pulled some bright red radishes and cut some lettuce. When Father saw them on the table, he exclaimed, "Where did you get these wonderful radishes? I never tasted better in my life!"

"They're out of our very own garden!" everybody shouted at once. And Father said, "Well, I never! They're the best I ever tasted!"

"And where did this wonderful lettuce come from?"

"It's out of our very own garden, too!"

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Father. "And the bread—is that out of our very own garden, too?"

"Oh, Father, you are so funny!"

A spade for Father,
A rake for Mother,
A hoe for Sister,
Another for Brother—
But a little mud pie for
ME!





Chapter VI SUMMER

GRASS a-growing everywhere,
A great big shady tree,
A dangly rope that is a swing,
Meant just for you and me.





Chapter VI SUMMER

As soon as school was out, the last week in May, it was summer in the town of Greenhill. An elaborate celebration was held on the last day of school, when the girls dressed up in white dresses and brand-new hair ribbons and spoke pieces, and the boys wore their Sunday suits and had their hair smoothly brushed and spoke more pieces. All the parents sat in a row on the platform and clapped and trembled and smiled whenever necessary. At the very end came a few parting remarks from the teacher, and school was over for another year. School was over and the whole town was flooded with skipping children. No one ever realized how many children there were until they were suddenly turned loose upon the town by the close of school. Children everywhere, everywhere children!

They almost seemed to grow on the bushes and hang from the trees! You couldn't go anywhere without walking on them. Playing with dolls on the front porch, playing baseball in the vacant lot, swinging on the gates, skipping on the streets, riding tricycles, wagons and bicycles, climbing trees, walking stilts dressing up in grown-up clothes, reading books in hammocks, running to the grocery on an errand or to the post-office for the mail, getting drinks at the pump in the back yard, picking daisies in the field, wading in the brook! Everywhere children, chil-

dren everywhere! Not to mention the babies in their cribs and baby-buggies!

Vacation from school, what a joy it was! No more spelling, no more hard problems, no more memorizing, no more running to get there before the last bell, no more speaking pieces—what a relief it was! No more work, nothing to do but play!

And yet it was curious that one of the favorite games of summer-time was "playing school."

Polly and Alice played school every day on the James's side porch. Even Ruth, who had never gone to school herself, except as a visitor, felt that she knew all about it and loved to be one of the pupils.

One day Polly came out dressed in a very gay green and purple petticoat of Mother's, with her hair done up in a knot on the top of her head. On her nose, she wore a pair of spectacles made from a wire hairpin, which made her look very cross, especially when she looked over the top of them.

All the children in the neighborhood were the pupils, and they behaved so badly that the poor teacher had her hands full. Ethel Simpson got up and stamped her foot and said she hated arithmetic, Dicky Clinker began throwing stones, John tickled the girls and pulled their hair, Ruth and Alice began jabbering out loud, and altogether it was such an unruly school that poor Polly didn't know what to do! She couldn't make them all stand in the corner and she couldn't send them all to the principal, because then she wouldn't have any left! So she just had to pretend not to see their naughtiness and go on with the lessons just the same.

"How much are two and two, Alice?" she asked.

"TWENTY-NINE!" shouted Dicky.

"What is the capital of Ohio, Ethel?"

"JERICHO!" in loud tones from the back. "No, I meant Jerusalem!"

"How much is six times nine, John?"

"I don't know, teacher. I haven't the slightest idea!"

"Well, then, we'll all rise and sing, A Froggy Would a-Wooing Go," said Polly in despair, "and after that you may all be excused."

"Hey, come on, let's go!" said the boys. "Gee, what a rotten teacher!" And school was over for the day.

Near the side-porch was the big old apple-tree. John and his two best friends, Dicky Clinker and Frank Jones, spent most of the summer building a wonderful house, which consisted mostly of floor, high up in the branches. They called it their "den" and proceeded to furnish it with rugs and pillows borrowed from the house, until Mother happened to notice what was going on and suggested some substitutes from the attic. Somehow or other they never seemed to spend much time in their "den" reading or resting, as they had expected to do, for there was always something more exciting on hand.

One day adventurous Dicky discovered that by climbing up very high on a certain branch, you could easily step across to the gutter of the roof above the front bedroom, and by following a ledge for a short distance, reach the unexplored heights of the roof. When he reached the top he was entranced by the nearness of the lightning-rods, the view down the chimney and over the surrounding country.

"Hey, you fellows, come on up! This is the best place of all!"

Summer 57

he shouted, and soon Frank and John were at his heels. The girls had just gone out to the barn, leaving Ruth below on the porch with her dolls. She heard the shout and the promise of excitement, so up she climbed. Although she was only six she was as good a climber as any of the boys. Up and up she went like a little squirrel. The step across from the tree to the roof was a little large for her short legs, but she made it without a tremor, and started along the ledge. The boys were perched on top of the gable, near the chimney, examining sparrow nests which they had found in some holes. When they saw Ruth coming, they shouted, "Hello, little sister!" "How did you get up here?" and "This is no place for girls!"

At noon Mrs. James came out in the yard to gather in her flock for dinner. The yard was deserted and silent. Wondering where her chickens might have flown, she suddenly looked up and saw a little blue one fluttering along the ledge on the topmost roof. She gave a gasp, and her heart began to thump. Her first thought was to call out, but she stopped just in time, thinking, "What must I do? What can I do?" And then she noticed John and the boys on top of the ridge.

"Oh, John," she called gently, "come down now; it's time for dinner." Ruth heard without being startled. "Ruth, I think you'd better sit down right where you are and wait until John comes, and I'll get Mr. Sully to bring his tall ladder for all of you."

Luckily, Mr. Sully, the town's house-painter, happened to be at work painting the Biddles' house next door. So Mr. Sully came to the rescue, and Ruth and the boys reached the ground in

safety. And Mother said to Mrs. Biddle afterwards, "Is it any wonder I am getting gray?"

At the back of the garden was the big red barn. Near by was the chicken-coop, in a big yard fenced in with wire-netting. This was the home of Polly's pets, twelve hens and a rooster. One time on a visit to Grandfather's farm in the country, he had made her a present of a little white chick with a lame leg. She brought it home and took care of it until it grew into a big fat hen. Its poor leg never did get quite straight and Whitey always walked with a limp, but that was the start of Polly's flock. Whenever Polly went out to the farm and whenever Grandfather came to town, it meant a new arrival in the chicken-yard.

It wasn't long until they became very tame, and when Polly went out with a pan of feed and began to call, they came running as fast as they could. In their eagerness they sometimes tried to gobble up Polly's shoe-strings by mistake.

Ruth had a little red-and-blue basket, just the right size for gathering the eggs. What fun it was to pick them out of the straw, so smooth and brown and warm!

One day Ruth went inside the coop with her basket while Polly scattered some grass for the hens.

"Oh! Polly! Just come and look here! See how many eggs I've found to-day. I've got eight in my basket and there are two more in that nest! You'll have to carry those, for my basket won't hold any more."

And what a surprise it was for Mother!

The big red barn at the back of the garden was the home of Pet, the family horse. She lived in a stall with a manger in front for her hay and a little box at one side for her oats.

Summer 59

Near by was a room filled with harness and some old worn-out saddles. Just across from Pet's manger there were two bins like deep closets in the wall, with doors fastened with wooden buttons. One was for corn, the other for oats. The biggest part of the barn was called the carriage-shed and in it were the phaeton and the old spring-wagon. There were two mows up the ladder, one with hay for Pet to eat and the other with straw for bedding.

The hay-mow was an ideal place for a circus, especially after John put up the trapeze and everybody, even the girls, learned to skin the cat and do all sorts of tricks.

John and his friends chose the hottest day of the whole summer, of course. Large posters, made out of wrapping-paper, were tacked to all the telegraph-poles in town announcing the "grandest show on earth"; mention was made of the "wild anermals," "acerbats" and "lemonade." Dicky insisted that lemonade must be mentioned, as that alone would draw a crowd. Preparations were made days in advance, but no amount of necessary labor was too much for the boys.

When at last the day came, everybody was filled with excitement. Nails were charged for admission, five each for adults and ten each for children, these rates being a special inducement to lure the grown-ups. Pins were accepted from girls, as substitutes, but Dicky Clinker, the powerful door-keeper, drew the line at horseshoe nails.

The menagerie was on view in the carriage-room downstairs and five nails extra were charged for a view. Dicky's bull-pup made a fierce tiger and the Biddles' old gray cat a sleek and hungry lion when caged in small chicken-coops with slats in front. The elephant was long-suffering old Pet in her stable, and all

sorts and kinds of animals and chickens were borrowed to make up the rest of the zoo.

The real circus was, of course, held in the hay-mow. The audience found very comfortable seats on the high part of the hay and could even go to sleep if they liked, it was so comfortable. John was ring-master and kept things humming. Frank Jones and Tommy Jenkins and some smaller boys made a noisy band with horns and drums. Ruth and Dicky Clinker were the star acrobats.

First Ruth came out looking like a butterfly, trimmed up in pink bows, and whirled around a few times on the trapeze. Music by the band. Then Dicky did some flip-flops in the hay. Harold Simpson did some bare-back riding on his big dog, Rover. More music. Interruption for lemonade selling by Polly and Alice—ice-cold, penny-a-glass, right this way! No nails for lemonade, no, sir, because this lemonade is expensive, penny-a-glass! More music. To conclude the performance, John announced that Ruth would do a new trick—leap from her trapeze through a hoop, and land on the floor right side up. Ruth came out smiling and bowing and took her place on the trapeze. The audience watched breathlessly. But just as she was about to make her flying leap, the rope came loose at the rafter!

Bump! Bump! Down came Ruth to the floor! It was so unexpected that the audience almost thought it was part



Summer 61

of her trick. John rushed to Ruth to see if she was hurt, but she was already on her feet, laughing and bowing and making her farewells to the crowd, and in a moment she had disappeared down the ladder.

After that came much applause and more lemonade—for those who could afford it. And then John had to chase the crowd home by saying, "Show's over! Clear out! Show's over! Come back again next year!"

It was John's chore to take care of Pet, feed and water her, keep her curried and brushed, clean out her stall and provide her with fresh bedding each night. There were always plenty of helpers on hand to throw down hay or straw. Polly's favorite way of doing it was to pile an enormous heap of hay right over the opening and then jump on the top and be carried all the way downstairs with a tremendous shout, which made Pet prick up her ears in wonder.

Ruth and Polly were always ready to help with the currying, because it was such fun to scratch good-natured old Pet with the curry-comb. And they loved to give her oats and fill the manger with hay and watch her eat. But carrying the water was John's own task because the bucket was too heavy for the girls. And oh, how heavy it got for poor John, too! Why is it that carrying water for a horse is one of the hardest things in the world to do?

Pet's outside door, which looked out on the back alley, was cut in two in the middle, so that when the upper half was opened, it made a window for her to look out of, while the lower half formed a gate to keep her from running away. One time, though, she did run away. Nobody knows whether some

one unhooked the latch or whether Pet did it herself with her nose. But when John went out to the barn with his bucketful of water, he found an empty stable with the door standing wide open. He dropped his water with a splash and ran shrieking to the house. "Oh, Mother, somebody's stolen Pet."

Mother put on her sunbonnet, slipped a halter over her arm, and got two ears of corn out of the bin. She started up the back alley with John, and soon they came to Stevens Lane, where they could look in both directions. But no Pet was in sight. Then Mother sent John down the next street while she followed Stevens Lane until she came to Main Street. Still no sight of Pet. Then all at once, back came John, quite breathless.

"Oh, Mother, Miss Chipping said she saw Pet down in her back alley!" Surely enough, when they came by Miss Chipping's house, they saw her there as unconcerned as you please, leisurely nibbling the grass.

"Now, John," said Mother, "you stay here and be very quiet, so you don't frighten her, and I'll see what I can do."

Then Mother stole up cautiously, closer and closer, and began to say foolish, coaxing words. Pet pricked up her ears and looked, as if to say, "Now, who are you and why are you bothering me when I am having such a good time?" Mother stood still and held out her corn and went on talking. But Pet paid no attention and went back to her grass. Still Mother did not move, but kept on coaxing. Finally the temptation proved too much for Pet, and she came near enough to take a bite of the corn. Mother let her eat a whole ear of corn all up and kept patting her on the nose for a long time before she slipped the halter on. And John thought that Pet walked home very meekly, as if she

Summer

63

knew she had been a naughty girl and wanted to promise never to do it again.

The children all loved Pet, for she was kind and gentle and long-suffering, especially when all three of them got on her back at once and Mother led her up and down the alley. One day John begged Mother to let her gallop a little, just to see how it felt; and so Mother said, "Giddap." Pet turned her head around and looked surprised, but all three of the children called, "Giddap, Giddap!" Then she was sure they meant it, so she picked up her hoofs and began to trot, with Mother holding the bridle and running on ahead.

"Oh, Mother, stop her, stop her!" "Oh, John, stop, please! I'm falling off!" shouted both the girls together, and Polly began to slide. Then, because she was holding on to Ruth so tightly, Ruth began to slide too, and because Ruth was holding on to John so tightly, he began to slide, and they all yelled, "Whoa, Pettie, whoa, Pettie, whoa!" And finally Pet stopped and looked around quite disgusted, as if to say, "Well, I hope you've had enough of that!"

Play, play the livelong day, Nothing to do but play! Our back yard is the place for me, Finest place in the world to be!





Chapter VII GRANDFATHER'S FARM

OUT in the field there is a cow, Chewing the grass all day, I'm glad there also is a fence, So in her field she'll stay!





Chapter VII

GRANDFATHER'S FARM

RS. JAMES got up one morning with a twinkle in her eye and a mysterious smile on her lips. As soon as Polly saw her, she said, "I know something nice is going to happen to-day!" But Mother became even more mysterious when bombarded with questions.

John seemed to be in the secret, for right after breakfast he and Mother started for the barn to hitch Pet up to the phaeton. Of course Polly and Ruth had to come, too, to ask more questions and try to help. Mother put most of the harness on, especially the bridle, because it was hard for John to get the bit under Pet's tongue. Then Ruth led her around to the side of the barn, where Polly had rolled the buggy out and stood holding up the shafts. Pet never seemed to learn to get directly under them, but had to be pushed and shoved, first on one side and then on the other until she stood exactly straight. Then Polly let the shafts down and everybody started to fasten the buckles. Polly jumped in and took the lines and drove all the way up the alley alone to the hitching-post in front.

Then everybody went inside to get ready, all but John, who shouted, "Good-by, have a good time," and ran off to join his friends on an all-day tramp to the woods.

Polly wore her blue plaid and Ruth her pink check, and they

both wore the black silk box-coats that Aunt Jennie had sent last Christmas, as well as the new spring hats. The very next thing they were all tucked into the phaeton, Ruth sitting in the middle, taking turns driving. Old Pet never seemed to mind who was holding the lines, but kept on jogging along just the same. Sometimes she would begin to poke and Mother would say, "Now, Pettie, it's not time for a nap," and take the whip to tickle her.

They had only gone a short distance, when Ruth shouted, "I know where we're going! I know where we're going! We're going to visit Grandmother and stay all day! I know where we're going! This is the way to Grandmother's house! I know where we're going!" And on and on until it sounded like a little song.

Sure enough, it was the way to Grandmother's house. They started out on Main Street, and went all the way to the end, past old Mike's house and the Joneses' house up on the hill. After that it was all country and trees and cows and pastures, and windmills and barnyards full of chickens. Up hill and down hill, and going up was very slow, for Pet had to walk all the way. And going down was very fast because there was no real pulling to that.

Soon they came to the Norcross farm, with its tiny yellow house and its enormous barns and sheds and coops of all shapes and sizes. There was Jimmie out in the barnyard yelling at the cows, but he didn't even look to see who was passing by. Around on the other side of the house was Mrs. Norcross, who brought eggs and butter to the Jameses' every Saturday. She waved her hand and called, "Hello!" to Mother. Then they passed the farm

that old Mr. Smart rented from Mr. Bangs in town, the Warners' with the enormous windmill, and the Foxes' with the porch on three sides. Mr. and Mrs. Fox were just driving out of their lane, sitting up in their spring-wagon, with the back part filled with bags stuffed fat. The Foxes said, "Good-morning!" and so did Mother, and then they said what a fine day it was and where might all the Jameses be going? And Mother told them to Grandfather's farm and Ruth added, "We're going to stay all day!" And Mr. and Mrs. Fox smiled and said that was fine and then they said, "Good-by!" and Mother said "Giddap!" to Pet, and on they went.

Soon they came to the railroad and Mother stopped and did just what it said, "Stop, Look and Listen." They stopped and looked and listened, but saw and heard nothing, so they drove over the tracks and down the hill on the other side. In a quarter of a mile they came to the iron bridge, and there Mother always told them the story about how the bridge had been a great big covered wooden one when she was a little girl, and how when she rode over it in a big wagon with Grandfather, the rumble sounded just like thunder.

Just beyond the bridge Mother had to turn out to one side for a big hay-wagon. A funny old farmer with a long beard was sticking his head, with a big straw hat on it, up out of the hay at the top. When he saw the girls, he shouted, "Goodmorning, girls!" and took off his hat with a flourish, smiling broadly.

Polly and Ruth knew every step of the way, and they both knew that after the bridge had been passed, it was only about five minutes to Grandmother's. Down a very gentle hill and then

up a pretty steep one, round a bend in the road, and there like a great surprise was Grandmother's house. Before Mother had time to tie Pet up to the hitching-post, Polly and Ruth were in Grandmother's arms and Mother did not get her kiss till last.

The girls rushed into the house to take off their wraps and put on their aprons and then Grandfather had to be hunted up, because Grandmother never had the slightest idea where he might be keeping himself. So while Mother and Grandmother settled themselves comfortably in rocking-chairs on the front porch, Polly and Ruth made a trip of general exploration out through the woodshed, barnyard, barn and pig-pen before they found him.

"Hello, hello!" they called, and a gruff voice answered, "Hello, yourself!"

"Are you Grandfather, or are you the biggest pig of all?" shouted Polly.

He listened a minute and when he was sure it wasn't a pig talking, he finally looked up and said, "For heaven's sake, where did you drop from? Why couldn't you tell me you were comin', so I might 'a' dressed up fer th' occasion? I'm ashamed to have



my two young lady granddarters see me lookin' so turrible they can't tell me from the pigs!"

And then he began to roar with laughter, as only grandfathers know how to do. When he came out of the pig-pen he said, "Well, well, well! So here's Polly and Ruth! No, don't touch me, I must go in and have a good wash first." And they followed him to the back porch, where he pumped the tin basin full of rain-water and dried his hands on the roller-towel.

Grandfather was tall, with long legs, a bald head and a lot of whiskers. When he smiled his eyes crinkled at the corners and he was never serious for more than a minute at a time. Grandmother was round and roly-poly and her face was covered with wrinkles. She wore her gray hair pulled back tightly, with an absurd little knot on top of her head. Her voice was soft and gentle and Grandfather said that when she laughed it sounded like a hen cackling! On Sundays she wore a black silk dress with a bustle and a gorgeous flounce at the bottom, and a little black bonnet on her head, with a plume that waved in the breeze.

"And now come here, my darlings!" shouted Grandfather after he had given his hair and whiskers a hasty brushing. He found a place on the bench between the milk-buckets and scrubbing-brushes and soon had a girl on each knee so he could hug them both at the same time.

"Don't kiss me, Grandfather! Your whiskers tickle! Don't, don't!" shouted Polly. "If you'll hold still a minute, Grandfather, I'll do the kissing." And she climbed up on the bench and gave him a kiss on top of his bald head. "That's the only proper place to kiss a whiskery man like you!"

The back porch soon became so noisy that Grandmother and

Mother had to come out to see what was going on, and Mother had to take her turn at being hugged. Then Grandfather had to hug Grandmother, so she wouldn't be left out of the fun. In the meantime everybody was stumbling over milk-buckets and market-baskets and mop-sticks, until Grandmother started to pick things up. When the clatter had quieted a little, the questions began.

"How is Father?" "And how is John?" "Why didn't John come along?" "And how is the hay crop?" "And is Polly quite strong again?" "And how is your rheumatism, Mother?" "Have you got all your summer sewing done, Mary?" And on and on, everybody talking at once.

After a while Grandfather said, "I wonder who wants to help me make hay while the sun shines?" Of course both girls shouted, "I do! I do!" and they put on their sunbonnets which Mother had brought along, took hold of Grandfather's hands and set off for the field. Grandfather put Ruth up in the driver's seat to hold the lines and keep the horses from running away. Polly took one of the pitchforks and started to help. But when the hired man came up and took it from her, she did not object in the least. Grandfather lifted her up on the top of the wagon to a comfortable seat on the soft hay. And Polly exclaimed, "Oh, why didn't I bring my five darling children? It would have been such a treat for them, because they've never had a hay-ride in all their lives!"

It was a hot and hungry crowd that came back from the field at noon, but Grandmother was ready for them with an overflowing table. Chicken and sweet potatoes and gravy and stuffing and corn-on-the-cob fresh from the garden, and after that pudding and pie and fruit—such a dinner as only a grandmother knows how to prepare.

Grandfather and Grandmother and Mother and the hired man talked and talked and talked over the dinner-table, until the girls began to think the meal would never end. Finally Mother said they might be excused and they made a dash for the straw-stack behind the barn. Some old speckled hens who were scratching away near by were startled nearly out of their wits by the whirlwind when the girls started sliding down. One side of the stack had a gradual slope which made it easy to climb up and the other side was beautifully steep for sliding.

When they got tired of that, Ruth discovered a long board. She put it through the wooden fence to make a see-saw, and soon they were bouncing up and down in the air, with pig-tails flying. When Grandfather drove up with a load of hay for the barn, they both jumped off and climbed on the tongue of the wagon in the back, and got a free ride. Then Grandfather helped them climb up to the top of the load, where they watched the hired man in the exciting business of pitching the hay up to the mow.

The afternoon passed before they knew it, and all at once they heard Grandfather calling, "Come along, girls, you haven't gathered the eggs for me yet." So they started out on a search for the hens' favorite hiding-places. Grandfather was much better acquainted with the hens and their habits than the girls were, so of course he had to help them. It was much more exciting than gathering the eggs at home, because there were so many more to gather, and the nests were in such unexpected places. Polly had her apron full to overflowing, and Ruth almost as

many, when suddenly Ruth gave a shout, and in her excitement almost dropped her lapful.

"Oh, Polly! Oh, Grandfather! Just come and see what I've found! Just look at the little darlings!"

Polly and Grandfather came running as fast as they could, and there in the hay, was a little nest of—not eggs, but kittens! Six little black-and-white kittens all curled up as cozy as could be.

"Just look, Grandfather," said Ruth. "There must have been cat-eggs here, instead of hen-eggs—don't you think so?" Grandfather went off in a roar of laughter, as he took Ruth's and Polly's eggs from them and put them into a safer place in a big basket. By this time, the noise had awakened the kittens and they opened their eyes to see what was going on. "Sh! Sh! Come away!" said Polly. "We don't want to wake them up," and she and Ruth ran to the house as fast as their legs could carry them, to surprise Mother and Grandmother with the news.

Mother and Grandmother were tearing carpet-rags, and the room in which they were working was covered with them. The girls told their news breathlessly, and Grandmother said, "Well, I never!" and Mother said, "Think of that!"

Polly and Ruth sat down for a while to help roll up the balls, when suddenly Polly asked, "Oh, Grandmother, couldn't we please go up to the attic for a while?"

"Oh, yes, please, Grandmother, please let's go," Ruth chimed in.

Grandmother said yes and led the way. She and Mother had to stoop to get through the attic door. They found comfortable seats on an old wooden chest and the girls on the floor. Then Grandmother opened the largest round-topped trunk and brought

out the lovely gowns, one after another, each with a story to it. Polly and Ruth tried on the little hoop-skirted dresses that had been Mother's when she was a little girl.

They had great fun trying to make the hoops behave properly when they tried to sit down. Then there was the mahogany cradle, and there were all of Mother's old china dolls and a dear little trunk filled with old-fashioned dolls' clothes.

Somehow the time seemed to fly very quickly, for the next thing they knew Grandfather was poking his head through the door and saying, "What's going on in here, anyhow? Who's coming out to watch me milk the cows?"

"We are! We are! Wait a minute, Grandfather!" And both girls ran out to the barn as fast as they could go.

Grandfather sat down on a box and began to milk.

"Let me try it, Grandfather," begged Polly. "It looks so easy, I'm sure I can do it. Ruth, you brush the flies off of Sukey, so she'll stand still for me."

Polly took her seat and pushed the pail under the cow.

But old Sukey was wise and knew a stranger was near and



began to swish her tail around. Polly didn't mind that, for she was determined to say that she could milk a cow. So she started in bravely. But Sukey swished her tail again right in Polly's face and gave a good strong kick which sent Polly over backwards and the milk-pail flying. Then Sukey moved off in disgust as far as her rope would let her. Polly picked herself up with Ruth's help and said, "All right, Grandfather. I guess you'll have to do the milking, after all. Sukey won't let me come near enough to her to milk her."

"What's the matter?" laughed Grandfather. "Doesn't Sukey like you?"

After that the girls were content to look on and let Grandfather do the milking. When he came up to the back porch with his pails overflowing, they each had a glassful of warm milk to drink.

Then Mother came out and said it was time to go home, and Polly wouldn't believe it and had to go in and look at the kitchen clock. Grandmother insisted they must all stay for supper, but Mother said no, because Father and John would be looking for



them at home. At last hats and coats were put on, and when they came out on the front porch they found Pet all hitched up and waiting.

Grandmother brought a big basket filled with cookies and butter and tucked it into the buggy. It was very hard indeed to say the last "Good-by" and not run back again for just one more hug. But Pet was anxious to start, so they all climbed in, and Mother said, "Giddap"—when all at once Grandfather shouted, "Oh, wait a minute! Don't go yet! I forgot something!"

He started running out to the woodshed and soon returned with another basket, a closed one this time, which he placed carefully on Polly's lap.

"Now, mind you don't open the lid, or you'll get your head bitten off!" he warned.

And Polly said, "It's something squirming—I can feel it!" So she and Ruth just had to take a peep, and what did they see but two of the little baby kittens!

"Oh, thank you, thank you, Grandfather!" they shouted as they drove down the lane. And soon they were off, waving hands and shouting, "Good-by, good-by!" until they reached the bend of the road and Grandfather's house disappeared from their view.

Pet was always much happier to go home than to start out, for she loved her home and stable, so she trotted off at a lively pace. Two very tired little girls were lifted out of the buggy by Father at supper-time, but not too tired to make a bed in the wood-box for the kittens and to decide, after a long argument which lasted all through supper-time, that the kittens should be called Dixie and Nixie. "I think bed is the best place in the world for a little girl who is tired and sleepy, don't you, Mother?" And almost before she had finished speaking, Polly was off in the land of dreams.

The farmer is a mighty man,

He plows the field all day;

He drives his horses, milks his cows,

And on fine days, makes hay!

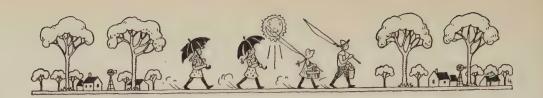




Chapter VIII FISHING

IET'S go fishing
In a brook,
Take a fish-line,
Pole and hook.
Oh, just see
The big fat worm!
See him wiggle,
See him squirm.
Oh! a bite!
Pull it quick!
No! No! Nothing,
Just a stick!





Chapter VIII FISHING

F you left town by the Watkins road and walked for nearly a mile and then turned into the woods, you found a lovely stream of water. It was called Spencer's Creek because it ran through Spencer's farm and was a great place for all the boys in town to go fishing. It didn't matter much that they caught almost nothing at all. There was always the hope that the next time luck would be better.

It wasn't often that John was willing to take his sisters fishing with him, for he had, like all boys, that natural disgust for small girls who were always trying to do whatever their big brothers did. But one hot summer day, as a special favor to Mother, who had to go to a meeting of the Sewing Circle, John consented to take the girls along after Mother promised to pack up a picnic lunch.

John carried the fishing-tackle and one pole, Ruth the lunch-basket and another pole. Polly insisted upon taking Susan, her youngest, and then she had to take an umbrella to keep her from getting freckles. At the last minute Alice Biddle from next door asked to go along too, and as she always imitated Polly, she had to take her doll, Nelly, and another umbrella to keep her from getting freckles. Polly suggested vaguely that it would be nice to take Dixie and Nixie, too, but John glared at her so she knew she didn't dare.

It was a funny procession they made as they skirted the town by alleys and then took the country road. Luckily, none of John's friends saw them marching along, "looking like an old lady's home!" After a long and weary trudge along a hot and dusty road they were all glad to reach the shade and coolness of the woods.

Polly and Alice played dolls and housekeeping and paying calls the whole afternoon. But Ruth was as faithful a fisherman as John. After giving the girls instructions not to move from the spot where they were, John and Ruth went a short distance down the stream to a clearer spot where they would be out of the sound of Polly's and Alice's chatter and settled themselves for a peaceful afternoon. Ruth was very brave about baiting her hooks with fishworms, and didn't scream a bit when they wiggled. Although she did have to grit her teeth while she did it, she was careful not to let John know it.

When all was ready, they threw their lines in; and then began the waiting, and the anxious watching of the bobber! The woods became quiet save for the rustling of a branch or the call of a bird. Ruth knew that the fun of fishing had begun and that she dared not make a sound if she wanted to earn the reputation of being a real fisherman. The time passed slowly, and it was all so quiet and still that she felt she would drop asleep if something didn't happen soon. All at once a shout was heard through the forest, and Ruth almost fell into the water, it frightened her so.

"Just look what I've caught! It's a catfish I think! Just look at his whiskers!" And John danced a jig for joy! And

Ruth said, "I wish you wouldn't shout so loud. You've frightened them all away from my hook now. And I think I nearly had one, because I saw the bobber move once."

John put his precious fish into his pail of water and then they settled down again, but the rest of the afternoon proved very uneventful as far as fish were concerned. It may be that John had frightened them away, or it may be that they did not happen to like the taste of the bait. Ruth was sure that they had been frightened because she did see her bobber move a few times, and every time she pulled her line, she was disappointed and got nothing. At last even John got tired and said, "I guess it's about time to have something to eat. Let's hunt up the girls." So they put away their fishing things and went back to the spot where they had left the girls playing dolls.

There was Susan in wide-eyed surprise sitting stiffly up to a stump table on which was spread a feast of stones and leaves. And Nelly, who appeared to have eaten too much, had fallen off her seat and buried her head in the grass. But where were the two fond mothers, and why had they left their darlings to dine in solitude? John and Ruth began to call and shout, but got only echoes for reply.



"You stay here," said John, "and I'll go and look. Isn't it just like them? Those girls can never do as they are told."

Ruth sat down and began to unpack the basket and to spread out the picnic supper, and she could hear John's voice fainter and fainter in the distance calling the names of Polly and Alice. Poor John strode along, calling and looking and hunting and growing more and more frightened as he felt the burden of his responsibility heavier and heavier upon his shoulders. All at once he noticed a spot of red on the ground, and, stooping, picked up one of Polly's hair-ribbons. "That's Polly's! Now they must be somewhere near, and if Polly James is hiding from me on purpose she is going to be spanked! Pol-ly! Pol-ly!" When the echo died away he heard a titter and then another and finally a giggle. He looked all around and could not decide where the noise came from.

"Polly James! Where are you? Tell me where you are this minute or you and Alice won't get any lunch!" And then he saw them sticking their heads out of a big hole in the trunk of a tree. "Where have you been, you naughty girls? I've looked everywhere for you, and we thought you were lost or drownded!"

Polly and Alice were still giggling as hard as they could, but when they saw that John was really serious Polly began to explain. "Well, you see, we thought we'd be babes in the woods. It was such a good chance 'cause we don't come to the woods very often, you know; and we played we had an 'maginary uncle who stole us away. You know how it goes.

[&]quot;'Two babes in the woods, their names I don't know, Were stolen away one bright summer day.'

And then there's that part about

"'The robins so red Brought strawberry leaves and covered their heads."

Only we didn't get to that part to play dead yet, because we were hunting for strawberry leaves and couldn't find them. And while we were looking, we came across this darling little house in this tree and we forgot all about being babes in the woods and decided to go to house-keeping here, and we were just going back to get our children and bring them to their new home when we heard you calling and we 'cided it would be fun to keep still and wait till you came up and then jump out and scare you."

"Huh! That's some fish-story!" said John. "Just you wait and hear what Father will have to say to you. I tell you Ruth and I were *sure* that you had fallen in the creek and got drownded! And I can tell you that this is the last time I'm ever going to take you fishin' with me. Now we won't talk about it any more!" he ended with a grown-up air.

In spite of this incident it was a happy party that sat on the ground around the basket a little later. And the poor sandwiches and deviled eggs and cookies didn't have much chance with four such ravenous appetites. Everybody felt much better afterwards, even the two youngest, Susan and Nelly, were well rested for the long walk home down the dusty road. As they turned the last corner and came in sight of home, Polly said to John, "John, you'll let me tell Father all about it, won't you? I'd rather do it myself."

And when the excitement over John's fish was over and Father and Mother had agreed that it must have been the greatest fishing trip in the world, Polly took Father by the hand and they went into his study and closed the door behind them. After a long time, when Ruth and John were starting for bed, Polly came out alone and said, "I'm sorry I was so naughty and I won't do it again, and if you'll take me along next time, I promise I won't be a 'sponsibility at all. I'll never run off again or make you think I got drownded." And John said, "All right, Polly, old girl!"

Let's go fishing in the brook, Take a fish-line, pole and hook; If we do not catch a fish, At least we can sit still and wish!





Chapter IX FOURTH OF JULY

OH, bring out your flags,
It's the Fourth of July!
Oh, light your firecrackers
And watch the sparks fly!

Oh, wave all your flags
For your country so free!
And send up your fireworks
For the whole world to see!





Chapter IX FOURTH OF JULY

HE glorious Fourth in the little town of Greenhill was a strenuous day. It began early and lasted late. Before the girls were out of bed, John was up, shooting firecrackers under their window. Pop—pop—pop—pop! Who can sleep on the Fourth of July? Pop—pop—pop! Get up, everybody! The fun has begun! Yes, and the noise, too! The sputtering and popping and booming and banging that would keep up all day long, beginning at dawn and lasting until midnight.

Polly jumped out of bed and ran to the window.

"Oh! John! Don't shoot them all off! Save some for us! We'll be down in a minute!" she called.

While she and Ruth were dressing hurriedly, she happened to look across the street and there a great surprise met her eyes.

"Oh, look, Ruth! Doc Johnson has a wonderful new flag! Did you ever see such a beauty?"

"Whew!" exclaimed Ruth. "It must be brand-new. I never saw it before. And he must have gotten up in the middle of the night to put it up!"

"My, I wish we had a beauty like that!" sighed Polly. "Just look, it's so large it almost covers up the whole front of his house. And that reminds me that we must put our flags out, too, right after breakfast."

With hair unbrushed and shoelaces flying, Polly and Ruth ran down the stairs, and the screen-door banged behind them.

"Why, Dicky Clinker, are you here? I bet you haven't had your breakfast," cried Polly.

"Naw, of course not! Who wants breakfast anyway on the Fourth o' July, I'd like to know? Give me a match, Johnnie. She's all ready. You girls had better get back or you'll get the scare of your young lives!"

As he spoke, Dicky lighted a small fuse sticking out from under Mother's upturned scrubbing bucket. Poppety-pop! Poppety-pop! Poppety-POP—POP—POP!!!! The girls took to their heels as the old bucket bounced around, while a bunch of large firecrackers exploded underneath.

"Say, but that is wonderful!" exclaimed Ruth, her eyes sparkling.

"What on earth was it?" came a shout from across the fence. In a moment Alice Biddle came running, quite out of breath, her eyes staring with astonishment.

"Have you got a cannon? Whose is it?" she asked.

"Cannon! Huh! Cannon! Haw, haw, haw! Say, these girls do beat the Dutch! Precious lot they know about cannons!" And John and Dicky went off into roars of laughter.

Just then the breakfast bell rang, and Mother said it looked as if noise before breakfast was good for poor appetites. And Father said it would take more than the Fourth of July to hurt appetites like the Jameses'.

After breakfast, Polly and Ruth ran upstairs and brought down the box of flags and took them out in the front yard.

"You can stick half of them around in the flower bed," said

Polly, "like Mrs. Clinker always does, and I'll get the stepladder and tie the others to the porch posts."

In another moment Polly was perched on the top of the ladder at the top of the steps, her arms filled with nails, hammer and string.

"Oh, Ruth, come quick! It's jiggling! I'm afraid I'll drop everything!"

Ruth came to the rescue and steadied the ladder as well as she could. But Polly, in reaching to grab a post to protect herself, spilled her armful down on Ruth's head!

"Oh! Ouch! Ouch! Polly! Do be careful!" Ruth's cries brought Father to the rescue.

"What a lucky thing the hammer hit your toe instead of your head, Ruth; it would have made a dent in the hammer, I'm sure," laughed Father, as he helped Polly down the ladder. "Now, look here, I'll put your decorations up if you'll be so kind as to hand them to me." And he climbed up the ladder and had all the flags and bunting up before Ruth's toe stopped hurting!

Just in time, too, for a second later Mother called from upstairs, "Girls, come now. If you want to go to the picnic you'll have to hurry, for Mrs. Biddle wants to start at ten o'clock."

"Oh, goody, goody! The picnic!" exclaimed Polly. "I'd almost forgotten all about it, with all the 'citement we've had already. Come on, Ruth!"

The "picnic" was really the Jones Family Reunion which was held each year on the Fourth. Everybody went whether they belonged to the Jones Family or not. And of course all the Joneses went, old and young, big and little. First there was great-

grandfather Jones, who was eighty-nine and walked with a crutch; and then his nine sons and daughters, all of whom were grandfathers and grandmothers themselves; then all their children and grandchildren; so the family alone made a large crowd.

This year Mr. and Mrs. James decided to stay at home quietly and rest, so kind Mrs. Biddle offered to take the three children along with her and Alice in their surrey.

Polly wanted very much to take some of her numerous doll family along, "because they've never had a ride in Mrs. Biddle's surrey in their whole lives, and they've been so angelic lately; it would be a splendid treat for them." But Mother discouraged the idea by saying that the dust from the road would ruin both their hair and complexions. So Polly put them all to bed for a restful nap and kissed them good-by affectionately. Then Ruth suggested that the dust wouldn't hurt Dixie and Nixie, so why shouldn't they take the kittens instead. But Mother said she thought Mrs. Biddle would have enough to do to look after three extra children, and it wouldn't be polite to ask her to bother with cats. And besides the kittens would run away and get lost unless they were kept in a closed basket all day, and they wouldn't enjoy that much. So everybody agreed that the cats would be better off at home.

Father gave Polly and Ruth each a dime to spend. Ruth decided not to take her new little red purse which Aunt Jennie had just sent, for fear she might lose it. So she tied her dime up in a corner of her handkerchief for safekeeping.

At ten exactly Mrs. Biddle drove the surrey up in front of the house and Alice came running in shrieking, "Are you ready? Are you ready?"

Father and Mother came out to see them off. John sat in the front seat with Mrs. Biddle so he could help her drive, and the three girls sat in the back. Mother tucked a well-filled basket in at their feet, beside Mrs. Biddle's, with many parting instructions about keeping white dresses clean and not eating too much and coming back early.

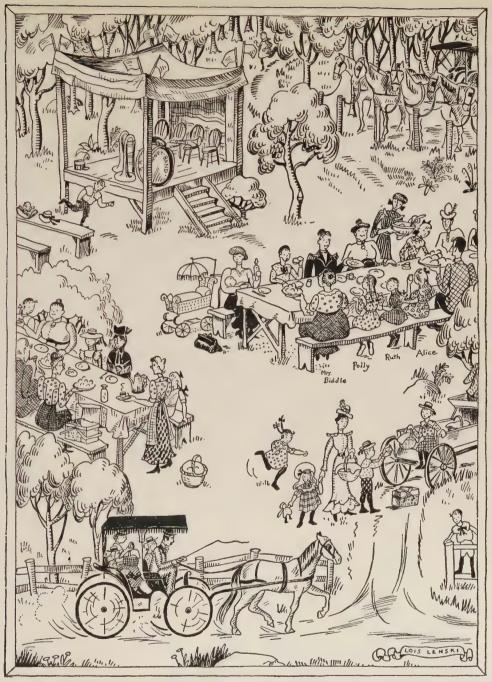
Father said, "My, I wish I were going along after all! Can't I sit on your lap, Ruth?"

Then Mrs. Biddle said "Giddap" and they started, waving their handkerchiefs and calling good-by until they were out of sight.

The ride was a long and dusty one and Polly was glad that she had left her dolls at home. When they drove into the woods they were one of a long procession of vehicles coming from all directions—buggies, surreys, spring-wagons and phaetons. And Mrs. Biddle had to take the lines from John, who had been driving most of the way, and drive a long way into the woods to find a place to unhitch her horse.

The crowd was already large and more and more people were arriving every minute. Mrs. Clinker, Miss Tompkins, Miss Chipping, Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Biddle and others were busily spreading white tablecloths and unpacking lunch baskets. Mr. Sam Jones had a crowd of boys around him helping to squeeze lemons. Bunny Allen was on the platform arranging the chairs for the band, to his satisfaction. Polly helped Mrs. Biddle unpack their baskets and Ruth found Mrs. Jenkins' twin babies to take care of.

At last all was ready. Mrs. Brown took a huge blue coffee-pot in her hand and began to pour the steaming coffee. Dicky Clinker



MRS. BROWN TOOK A HUGE BLUE COFFEE-POT IN HER HAND AND BEGAN TO POUR THE STEAMING COFFEE.



and John James were sent off to call the men to dinner. Polly and Ruth and Alice took their seats down at one end of one of the tables, and what an array of food met their eyes! A plate of fried chicken sat in front of John, an enormous chocolate layer cake with frosting half an inch thick in front of Polly, and a pile of sandwiches in front of Ruth! And when the food was passed! Oh, my! A dish of potato salad, sandwiches, deviled eggs, buns with ham! Oh, my! Fried Chicken! Sandwiches! Just one this time! Potato chips, buns, pickles! Peaches, apples, cookies! More deviled eggs! More buns with ham! More potato chips! Layer cakes, brown, white, yellow, with nuts, with no nuts! Oh, my! More pickles! More buns! Just one more! More fried chicken! Oh, my! Oh, my! How good it all tasted, and how sad to have to stop! What a pity not to be able to keep on and on and on— But Mother said not to eat too much-

And then all the work of clearing up and sorting dishes and forks and spoons. The tables seemed to be cleared as if by magic. So many busy hands, so many laughing, shouting voices!

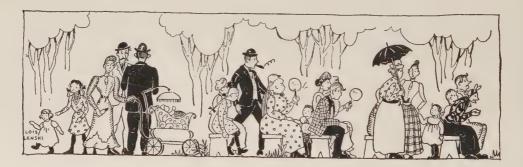
In the afternoon came the program. The members of the town band began to take their places, making curious sounds tuning up their instruments. Polly and Alice joined an admiring crowd of children gathered about the enormous drum. "Greenhill Cornet Band" in large impressive letters encircled its face. Bunny Allen, the barber, and fat Mr. Perkins, the druggist, and old Mike, who played the slide-trombone, looked like strangers when they were all dressed up in gilt braid.

At two o'clock they took their places and began their favorite piece, to draw the crowd to their seats. Mrs. Biddle called the

children away from the drum and they sat down on the bench beside her.

Between musical selections there were speeches. Reverend Brown's was very patriotic and very long and loud. By the time he had finished, Polly was wishing her bench had a back, and Dicky Clinker was pulling Alice's pig-tails. The band played again. More speeches! Very hot! The benches grew harder and more uncomfortable. Mrs. Biddle told Dicky he must be quiet. More music! More speeches! Getting hotter!

The band men opened their collars at the neck for comfort, wiped their dripping faces, and drank lemonade to keep cool. More music! Speeches now by a few of the smallest Joneses dressed in their Sunday best. A ripple of interest and half-hearted clapping. Hotter and still hotter, as the music continued. Much energetic fanning with the palm-leaf fans, decorated with the name of their donor, Mr. Brell, furniture-dealer from Riverbend. Ruth leaned up against Mrs. Biddle and went to sleep. John and Dicky began catching flies. The family history and annual record were read in a nasal voice by a gawky young Jones. More clapping. And at last "My Country 'Tis of Thee," and the program was over for another year.



The children gave sighs of relief, jumped to their feet and rushed to the woods.

"Why on earth they have to talk so long and speechify so much I can't see," grumbled John. "That's not my idea of a good time,—to sit all day on a narrow board and roast to death! Gee, I'm glad that's over!"

The girls went for a walk in the woods, then took off shoes and stockings and waded in the brook, while the boys made dams and whittled boats out of sticks. How good it was not to have to sit still any longer!

All at once Ruth shouted, "I think I'll go and spend my money before they sell out all the ice-cream. Who's going with me?" And she began to put on her shoes and stockings. She pulled out her handkerchief, but the dime was gone!

"Oh, where is my dime? I must have dropped it!" The other girls came running up. "Where is your purse, Ruth? Didn't you bring it?" asked Polly. "No, I was afraid I might lose my purse, so I tied my money in a corner of my handker-chief, and now it's lost and I haven't anything to spend!" And the last words ended in a sob.

Polly and Alice put their arms around her and together they



began the search. But they soon realized that it was hopeless. "Never mind, darling," said Polly, "I'll give you a nickel of mine and we'll each have a dish of ice-cream." At the sight of the heaping dish, so pink and tempting, with the spoon stuck invitingly in the top, Ruth cheered up, forgot her woes and decided the ice-cream was the best she had ever tasted.

When they came back to the band-stand they found the talking and visiting still going on, so Alice hunted up her mother to beg for more money to spend. But Mrs. Biddle was firm and said "No" for absolutely the last time. Besides it was time to go home, and Mrs. Biddle told the girls not to run away, while she went to hitch up her horse. John came up just in time to take his place in the front seat and when Mrs. Biddle asked him whether he had had enough picnic, he said, "Oh, not half enough picnic, but enough speeches to last me until I die, and then some!"

But the Fourth was not yet over. That night the town was gay with fireworks. Of course everybody was tired after such a strenuous day at the Reunion, but no one was too tired for fireworks. Besides, as Mrs. James said, the Fourth of July is like Christmas; it comes only once a year. And it wouldn't end properly at all without fireworks.

Mr. Bangs had the biggest display and people came from miles around to see them. They sat in rows on his lawn; they perched on his fence; they climbed telephone poles and crowded neighboring porches. Pin-wheels, sky-rockets and Roman candles and each successive wonder brought up a shout of surprise and wonder from the admiring crowd. Mr. Bangs saved the finest rocket for the end. It had the loudest bang of all and threw a gorgeous American flag in the sky which made everybody clap. They knew

without being told that that was the last one and, after the applause, they gathered themselves together and went home. So ended the glorious Fourth!

Sing a song of rockets, Sailing up so high, Roman candles booming As they hit the sky!

Sing a song of gladness,

Thankful as can be

For the Fourth so glorious

And our flag so free!





Chapter X SUNDAY

Tuesday's ironing day;
Wednesday, Thursday, mending,
Putting clothes away.
Friday is for cleaning,
Saturday for play;
Sunday is for going to church
And being good all day.





Chapter X SUNDAY

WERY Sunday morning the people in Greenhill dressed up in their very best clothes and went to church. The church was white and had a pointed steeple, and a graveyard in the field at the back. The Reverend Mr. Brown was the preacher.

On a very hot Sunday in midsummer, Polly and Ruth got up early and before breakfast had their dolls dressed in their newest, most fashionable clothes. Samantha Jane looked especially beautiful in a brand-new gown of pink cheesecloth, all shirring and ruffles and lace.

Polly was so pleased with the sight of her that she asked Mother if she might take her along to church. But Mother said "No," because church was no place for dolls.

"Very well, then, my darlings!" Polly consoled herself. "You behave yourselves while I am gone and sit very still on the window-sill, and this afternoon you shall have church of your very own and a chance to show off your beautiful gowns!"

When Mrs. James and the girls walked into church, the singing had begun, so they hurried to take their places. The Biddles sat in the pew right in front of the Jameses, and Polly couldn't see the board with the hymn numbers on it because Mr. Biddle's broad back was in the way. So she leaned over in front of Mother to ask Ruth, and Ruth whispered back "Three hundred

and fifty-six" so loudly, that Mr. Bangs across the aisle turned and looked at her. Poor Ruth blushed hotly and hid her face in her hymnal.

Somehow, something seemed wrong with the singing! Polly found her place and started in, but it sounded as if she were the only one making any noise. She looked around, and saw other people's lips moving, but something was wrong with the singing. All at once she looked up at the choir on the left-hand side and then she saw what the trouble was.

Miss Chipping was not at the organ! Miss Chipping, who was never known to miss! Miss Chipping, who loved to tell that she had never once missed playing the organ for twenty years! Miss Chipping must be sick! Think of it! Polly squeezed Mother's arm and pointed and wanted to tell her all about it, but Mother said "Sh! Don't point!" and kept on singing. Mr. Bangs was singing as loud as he could to make up for the loss of the organ. By the time the last verse was reached the singing sounded very well indeed, perhaps because the people sang as slowly as they pleased and did not have to bother to keep up with the organ.

After a while came the sermon. Mr. Brown had a big nose and liked to use long words that no one could understand. He waved his hands about when he preached, and every time he brought his fist down in a hard thump on the pulpit he made Polly jump.

She loved to watch his hair. A long black lock of it came way down on his forehead, starting back somewhere back of his bald spot. Whenever he shook his head it came bouncing down into his eyes, and then he had to give his head a jerk, to get

it out of the way, so he could see again. It reminded Polly of the way old Pet out in the stable shook her head up and down.

The room became warmer. A fly buzzed against the window. Mrs. Jenkins' twin babies both started crying at once, so she and Mr. Jenkins had to take them out. Mr. Brown calmed his voice a little and told a story which made everybody smile. Polly leaned against Mother's shoulder and settled down for a nap. Two boys in the back seat giggled and Mr. Brown looked at them fiercely. The fly buzzed again. A girl across the aisle dropped her penny on the floor. At last Mr. Brown finished, winding up with a flourish, and the people roused themselves and stood up. Polly woke with a start and began fishing for her money. Deacon Norcross took up the collection and then there was more singing.

After church, everybody visited everybody else on the front steps and in the graveyard for a long time. Mother spoke to all her friends and Polly and Ruth had to be very dignified and shake hands and say "Howdy-do!" instead of "Hello!" Soon the country people started to drive off, because it was getting late for dinner. And gradually the crowd got thinner and thinner until they were all gone. A Sunday School teacher came out with her arms full of books. Then the preacher came out in his shiny long-tailed coat, and they walked part of the way home together, talking. Then the janitor came out and locked the front door behind him. So church was over for another week.

That afternoon a very special service was held out on the side porch. The dolls sat quietly in a row on the bench. Ruth was a noisy preacher, wearing one of Father's old black coats, and Polly was the deacon, and passed the collection plate. Alice Biddle came over and as there was nothing else for her to do, Polly rushed off and got the two kittens, Dixie and Nixie, and tossed them into her lap.

"These are your two twin babies! You be one of the audience and help with the singing." Very soon they found that they had sung all the hymns they knew. School songs came next and they were just ending up with "I'm a gypsy! I'm a gypsy," at the top of their voices, when who should come walking around the house but the Reverend Mr. Brown himself, long-tailed coat and all!

The song stopped abruptly.

"Well, my dear children, and what are you doing on Sunday afternoon? Having a nice quiet play?" asked the Reverend Mr. Brown, stooping to pat Ruth on the head and looking suspiciously at her long coat which reached to the ground. Ruth dodged because she considered herself too old to be patted, and did not care to answer uncomfortable questions. So she darted away and ran around the house as fast as she could go, coat-tails flying.

"Why, we were—just—playing—school!" Polly stuttered "School for our dolls, you see!" she added brightly, pointing to them on the bench.

"That's nice, that's very nice, I'm sure! And now are your dear Father and Mother at home on this warm afternoon?" and he mopped the perspiration from his brow with a silk hand-kerchief.

"Yes, sir, I think they are. If you will just come in the house, I'll see."

And she led him into the sitting-room, where luckily she found Father and Mother, and turned their guest over to them.

"Here is Mr. Brown, Mother," she said, and left him.

She went out to the porch again and she and Alice and Ruth, who had come back, sat on the bottom step and talked in whispers until they saw the figure of the Reverend Mr. Brown leaving the house and walking down the street.

"Well, darlings, it's too bad we had to stop right in the middle of our singing just when you were all doing so nicely! But I've got another idea! I'll tell you what let's do. Let's have a christening party and baptize her. I'm sure Samantha Jane will enjoy that!"

"Oh, but she's already got a name," objected Ruth. "You named her when you first got her. How can you name her again?"

"Never mind about that. I can just tack a new name onto the others. Lots of people have three names! Father's name is Richard Charles Henry and I don't suppose he got all three of them at once. Mothers can't think of so many all at one time. And you see, we ought to do something different to-day because it isn't often she gets such a lovely new dress. I think Amaryllis is a pretty name, don't you?" said Polly.

"But that's the name of a flower, I'm sure it is," objected Alice.



Sunday 107

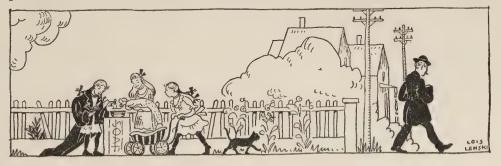
"I've heard Mama speak of it and I 'spect she's got one."
"Well, I don't care!" said Polly. "It sounds very nice,
Samantha Jane Amaryllis. It sounds very important and I think
it just suits the new pink cheesecloth dress."

So Ruth was the preacher again and brought the tin basin from the kitchen filled with water. And Polly ran and got a piece of old lace curtain to wrap around Samantha Jane, to make her look more festive.

And Alice had to put the kittens down and let them run away so she could hold Samantha Jane and be godmother. It was a very solemn occasion with much mumbling of words, and then Ruth dipped her hand in the water and said, "And now your name is Samantha Jane Amaryllis," flourishing her hand with much gusto.

Samantha Jane was most angelic and never even winked an eyelash when the water touched her head. But everybody had forgotten her loose wig, and, splash! off it went into the water, and poor Samantha Jane Amaryllis was shorn of her glory at its very height.

"Put it back on again quickly and nobody will notice," whispered the fond mother. So the preacher rescued it quickly,



mumbled some more words and the christening was over.

"Well now, that's done! What shall we do next?" asked Ruth. "It's a pity to waste a good preacher," and she went swishing around in the yard with her nose up in the air and she looked exactly like the Reverend Mr. Brown.

"Oh, I'll tell you!" shouted Alice. "Let's have a funeral and bury Samantha Jane Amaryllis! I heard Mama say that people wear 'shrouds' when they are buried, and the pink cheesecloth dress would make a lovely one!"

"But if we buried her, really and truly, her new dress would get all dirty and I can't allow that," answered Polly.

"Oh, no," said Ruth. "We don't need to get it dirty at all. I know where there's an empty shoe-box that she will fit into beautifully." And she ran off to get it.

Alice ran to the woodshed to get a shovel.

"Let's make the hole over here under the yellow rose bush," said Polly, and she started to dig.

Finally she decided that the hole was deep enough because the digging was pretty hot work. So Samantha Jane Amaryllis was tenderly laid in the shoe-box, with the piece of lace curtain draped around her and under her head for a pillow.

"It's lucky she's a sleeping doll, isn't it?" said Alice. "Otherwise she wouldn't look dead!"

Then the lid was put on and a string tied around to hold it on tightly and the box was very carefully placed in the bottom of the hole to the sound of much mumbling of words from Ruth, the preacher, using her two hands for a book. Polly and Alice forgot to weep any tears in their excitement about filling in the dirt and finding a big stone and some flowers to put on the top.

Sunday

Just as they were putting on the finishing touches, Mrs. Biddle came to the fence and called Alice to come home, and soon after it was time to go in the house for supper.

As soon as the girls had dried the supper dishes, they rushed out to the yellow rose bush and dug up long-suffering Samantha Jane Amaryllis. Polly unpacked her tenderly, found her none the worse for wear, undressed her and put her to bed affectionately.

"What an exciting day you have had, my darling! Think of it, getting a new dress and being christened and buried and dug up again all in the same day! I'm sure you are tired out and ready for sleep. So good night and sweet dreams!"

> The preacher is a serious man, His church, it has a steeple; He dresses up in shiny black And preaches to the people.





Chapter XI SCHOOL

Hurrah for the shining faces, Hurrah for the ribbons new, Hurrah for the books and the school-bags, Hurrah for the teacher, too!





Chapter XI SCHOOL

HE first day of school was a great event in the little town of Greenhill. It was very curious that no matter how happy the children had been when school closed in May, they seemed to be still happier to go back again in September. Even Arithmetic and Spelling were interesting when they had not been thought of for three long happy months. The fat old sun got up bright and early and chuckled to himself as he saw all the children popping out of bed so early, and watched the excitement and confusion in all the houses. What a hustle and bustle it was, scrubbing faces until they shone, brushing teeth, tying brand-new hair-ribbons on tightly braided pig-tails, collecting books, school-bags and pencils.

John spent fifteen minutes before the mirror tying his new blue and green striped tie, and finally gave it up in disgust and let Mother do it. Alice Biddle was ready much too early and came over and stood around and talked so much that nobody could think at all. So Mrs. James told her she'd better go home again until after the children had had their breakfast, and then they would stop for her at her front gate. Nobody had time to taste such common things as cereal or milk on a morning like this and poor Mother had a hard time to keep the children from rushing off without a bite.

Just as breakfast was over and the last bite swallowed, the first bell rang and with a whoop and a shout of "Good-by," they were off, skipping down the street. It was Ruth's first day at school, and she carried her precious new pencil-box in her hand, which Father had brought home to her the night before. It was a lovely one, with a sliding cover with roses painted on the top.

Alice joined them at her gate, and so did Dicky and Ellen Clinker down at the next corner, and then began the race to see who could reach the schoolyard first. John and Dicky were soon a long distance ahead, so the girls decided to take their time and strolled the rest of the way arm in arm. When they reached the schoolyard, Dicky jumped out at them from behind a bush.

"Hello, grandmothers, why are you so poky? Talkin' 'bout doll-babies, I s'pose!"

"You go away, don't talk to us! We've no use for wild Indians like you!" said Alice.

"Well, if I'm an Indian, you're a squaw, so there!" he shouted, and began to pull her pig-tails until she started after him. The last bell put an end to the discussion and the chase, and they soon forgot all about it as they rushed to take their places in line before marching in.

Polly and Alice felt very grown up and important to be promoted to the Fourth Grade. It was most exciting to move into the Second Room and have Miss Frank for a teacher. Miss Frank had pink cheeks, a long gold watch-chain and a gold watch tucked in her belt, and wore a little black bow perched up in her curly hair. She was adored by all the small girls in school.

As the children marched in, there was a scramble for seats.

The boys made a dash for the back seats and got there first. Ethel Simpson and her most intimate friend, Dora Bowser, the butcher's daughter, were quick enough to get the two seats in front of Dicky Clinker and Frank Jones. John James got his old seat back in the corner, Polly and Alice, being newcomers, were a little frightened, hesitated for a few moments, and then when they went to sit down, found that the only seats left were in the front row.

"Now, children, it doesn't matter at all where you sit to-day," said Miss Frank. "After a few days we will all find the seats that are best for us. Let us see if we can be quiet for a few minutes."

Polly felt very strange to be sitting in the Second Room with the Fifth and Sixth Grade children, to whom she looked up in the greatest admiration. Her seat was the nearest to Miss Frank's desk, and she could see plainly everything that was on it,—the big beautiful revolving globe for geography, the little round bell for tapping, the square box full of long white pieces of chalk, a pink vase for flowers—such interesting things that Polly decided at once never to change her seat if she could help it.

"How many children remember our 'Good Morning' song from last year? Let me see hands," said Miss Frank, as soon as the room became quiet.

A few straggling hands went up.

"Well, since we have so many newcomers, we may as well all learn it over again. I will sing the first line for you. Please listen carefully!"

"Good morn-ing, dear teach-er, good morn-ing to y-ou!" Her

voice rang out sweetly, but was cut off short by a rumble from the back of the room:

"I hope you are well, and your grandchildren too!!!!"

The children burst out with laughter.

Miss Frank smiled and looked around the room. Two rough heads at the back of the room ducked down out of sight.

"I see you do know it after all! And there's nothing I'd like better than to have half-a-dozen grandchildren! Now, come on, boys, and help us sing."

"Ding-ding-a-ling! Ding-ding-a-ling!" sounded a bell from the floor above, to interrupt the singing.

"That's for assembly, children. We will all march up to the high school, for Miss Reed has some things she wants to tell us. Please go as quietly as you can."

To go to assembly was very exciting, for it was the only time that the children in the First and Second Rooms got to see the inside of the high school. The march up the long flight of steep stairs was most exciting and a visit to the Fourth Room was like a visit to an unknown world. All the children had to double up, two in a seat, and sometimes some had to stand.

Miss Reed was principal and high school teacher as well. She was short and rather fat. She wore stiff white choking collars with lace jabots, and nose glasses with a black ribbon, the other end of which was fastened to her white shirtwaist with a gold pin. Her stiff cardboard cuff-protectors were the envy of every high school girl, while her small but piercing brown eye struck awe into the heart of every boy in school.

As soon as the crowded roomful of children became quiet, Miss

Reed made her first-day-of-school speech. Her vigorous manner and her compelling eye held the attention of every one—even the bad boys from the Third Room who were the despair of their teacher, Mr. Stump. She spoke of many things—good report cards, school spirit, George Washington, education, how to study, and ended with the Golden Rule. After that the whole school joined in singing certain favorite selections. "There's a Cottage on the Hillside" was followed by "Speed Away on Thine Errand of Light." "Poor Pussy" by the First Room concluded the program.

The Second Roomers walked downstairs in order and took their places again. Miss Frank asked all the children to copy from the blackboard the list of books necessary for each grade. to be bought at P. W. Jones's hardware store.

Ethel Simpson wrote for a minute, then held up her hand to ask if she might go to the wood-box to sharpen her pencil.

"Why, yes, Ethel, here is my knife," said Miss Frank.

Ethel went to the wood-box and began to sharpen. She held a beautiful blue pencil in her hand. She kept on sharpening. Then she was holding a beautiful yellow pencil in her hand. More whitling! A green one! Chip, chip, chip, more whittling! A purple one! Ethel seemed to be loaded with pencils. Where did she get them all? And what was she doing to them?

Polly, in her seat near by, watched her, fascinated. Why, she was sharpening them all away. Lovely new pencils, enough to last a year or more! Where did she get them all?

Finally Miss Frank noticed that all eyes were glued on Ethel at the wood-box.

"Why, Ethel, how long does it take you to sharpen a pencil?"

"She's whittled away six of them, Miss Frank," piped up Dicky Clinker. "I counted 'em!"

"What is it, Ethel? What is taking you so long?" asked Miss Frank.

"Well, you see, Miss Frank, when I sharpened the first one, the lead broke, and I kept on and it broke again, and then it broke again, and I took another pencil and it broke too and—" She threw a glance at her intimate friend Dora and giggled—

"That will do, Ethel!" said Miss Frank sharply. "You will please stay in at recess."

But Ethel tossed her head and smiled broadly, as she went to her seat, followed by all eyes.

"Ding-ding-a-ling! Ding-ding-a-ling!" sounded the bell for recess.

The schoolhouse was a funny big square building with a steeple on top for the bell. It stood on the top of a hill with a long sloping yard in front. At one side of the main walk was the big baseball diamond where the big boys played. Behind the school was the girls' diamond.

The Second Room girls made a dash for it, because Nancy Jones had brought her bat and ball. Mildred got there first, so she was first batter, and Dora Bowser and Nancy Jones were second and



third. Ellen Clinker was pitcher and Grace Jenkins catcher. Polly and Alice and the others had to be fielders.

Mildred batted badly, as she always did, and Ellen caught her ball on first bounce so that put her out. Then it was Nancy's turn to bat. Nancy Jones was the best girl batter in school and all the others envied her. She was tall and thin and her long arms seemed to be able to reach out in any direction to bat the ball. Then, too, she was so strong that she could always send the ball flying.

As she took her place, every one watched her. Ellen was a good pitcher and pitched a good ball the first time.

"Bang!" sounded Nancy's bat, and away went the ball,—up and up and on and on, across the road and then down again, right in old Mrs. Mercer's garden!

"Oh, say! Nancy! That was a beauty! But just see where it landed!" exclaimed the girls in chorus.

The girls all made a dash for the road and old Mrs. Mercer's fence. But they were stopped just in time by Mrs. Mercer herself, who leaned out of her window, shaking her fist and shouted:

"Get right off o' that fence, you bad girls! And don't you dare to set foot in my yard, or I'll have you all arrested!" And she looked so fierce that they felt sure that she meant it.

Just then the recess-bell rang and they had to run to their places. Nancy was the heroine of the day, both because of her wonderful batting and because of the loss of her ball.

After recess, Miss Frank gave the Fourth Grade a lesson in spelling.

"Attention!" "Turn!" "Stand!" "Pass!" At these signals the children sat up, turned to the aisle, stood up, and marched to

their places at the recitation bench in front of the windows. In spelling, they all stood, and whenever a child missed a word, he or she had to pass to the foot of the class.

After several rounds of easy words, Miss Frank came to "seize." Dora Bowser was at the head of the class.

"Seize," pronounced Miss Frank, "meaning 'to grasp."

Dora hesitated a moment and then spelled slowly "s-e-z-e."

"Not quite, Dora. I'm afraid you'll have to go to the foot."

Mildred Brown went down next with "s-e-e-z-e."

Then Dicky Clinker, loudly: "s-e-e-s-e," and the whole room laughed at that.

"Well," said Miss Frank, "I never knew before that there were so many different ways of spelling an easy little word of only five letters."

Ethel Simpson was next: "s-i-e-z-e."

"Now we are getting warmer," said Miss Frank. "There's only one other way possible for you to spell it, Polly."

Polly smiled and said: "s-e-i-z-e," and proudly took her place at the head of the class. As she passed Dicky Clinker, she heard him whisper, "Smarty! Smarty!" but she pretended not to hear.

The rest of the morning and the afternoon session were taken up with various reviews of arithmetic, geography, spelling and the like among the three classes. Work was not very serious because of the lack of school-books. But Miss Frank managed to keep most of the boys and girls busy and interested.

At noon, school was dismissed for an hour for dinner. The town children had to rush home to eat and then race back as fast as their legs could carry them. The children from the country, who brought their lunches in tin pails, were the envy of all the

town children. In the winter they sat around the hot stove to eat it and spent the rest of the time scribbling on the blackboard. They had to wear mufflers and hoods and fascinators and arctics to keep warm, for some of them had to walk three miles or more. In warm weather, after eating their lunch, which took a remarkably short time, they had all the rest of the noon hour to play baseball or prisoners' base or jump rope or do other interesting things.

That afternoon when school was out, Nancy Jones decided to try to get her ball back. She made all the girls stay in the school-yard, while she went alone up to Mrs. Mercer's front door. She knocked and when Mrs. Mercer came and opened it, she asked nicely for her ball and said she was sorry for knocking it over the fence. To her great surprise, old Mrs. Mercer was very friendly and gave it to her, and asked her to do all she could to keep the girls from climbing over her fence and breaking it and walking over her garden. Nancy promised she would, and thanked her for the ball.

When she came back to the girls, they asked her:

"Did she eat you up alive?"

When Nancy told them what had happened, they all looked at each other in wonder and thought, "Perhaps she's not so bad after all!"

When they saw the ball safe in Nancy's hands again, Polly and Alice started home arm in arm, discussing all the events of the day. Various other children were straggling along in groups going in the same direction. All at once Dicky shouted, "Let's play tag, I'm it!" At this signal they scattered and the chase began. Alice Biddle was the first one caught, as usual, and even

when she succeeded in catching some one else, somehow it was not long until she was caught again. So the boys nicknamed her "Alice Baby Biddle," and that made her furious!

When Polly and Ruth reached home, the very first thing they did was to hunt for Mother.

"Mother, Mother, where are you?"

Upstairs, downstairs, in the cellar, in the kitchen, where could she be. At last they found her picking flowers in the garden, and then Mother was smothered with hugs and kisses and heard all about the First Day at School.

We read and we write,
We study, recite.
That's all we do at school!
We add and subtract,
We learn each new fact.
That's all we do at school!
We work and we play,
To pass time away.
That's all we do at school!





Chapter XII AUTUMN

KNOW the month I like the best,
And that's October brown;
When all the leaves of orange and red
Come tumbling, tumbling down;
When all the earth is filled with gold,
The air with smoky haze.
I know the time I love the best,—
The Indian Summer days.





Chapter XII AUTUMN

ATER school began, everybody knew that summer was over and autumn had come. All of a sudden, almost overnight, the leaves began to turn red and fall, and cover the ground with a carpet for the children to wade in. Wading and rustling and skipping through the leaves, piling them up and then jumping into the pile and being buried, raking them up, loading them onto the wheel-barrow and lighting a big bonfire just at dusk! In the little town of Greenhill, fathers and mothers and children spent days and days raking up leaves, and still they fell, gently, gently dropping, or else furiously tossed and hurled about by a passing wind. Polly and Alice on their way to school spent their time looking for pretty leaves of bright colors and pressed them carefully in their school-books.

The old apple tree in the Jameses' yard was always loaded with apples. John had to borrow all the ladders in the neighborhood and ask all the boys to come and help. It was really surprising how many apples the old tree could hold, not counting those that had fallen to the ground and been picked up and eaten. Ruth was the best climber of all, and because she was so light, she was able to go up higher than any one else and get the best apples way up at the top.

One time she got stuck. Her foot caught in a crotch of the

tree and she could not pull it out, no matter how hard she tried. Luckily John was there and he and Father together were able to rescue her by unlacing the shoe and slipping her foot out. When she came down to the ground again safely, Father laughed and pulled her pig-tail, saying:

"Squirrels will be squirrels, I suppose!"

One Saturday in October, Mother came to breakfast with a determined look in her eye.

"Who wants to help Mother to-day?" She looked around the table at each in turn.

No answer until Father murmured, "Not I!" and ducked his head under the table.

And Ruth said, "Is it something dreadful, Mother? You do look so fierce!"

After the laugh which followed, Mother said, "Well, there are ever so many things waiting to be done. The crocuses and the tulips must be planted, the tomato vines pulled up and all that trash burned, the screens ought to be taken off and packed away, the stoves put up, the lawn-swing taken down. . . ."

"Help! Help! Mother! That's quite enough for one day!" begged Father.

"Well, you know," said Mother, "it isn't safe to leave anything out over Hallowe'en, and the first thing you know we'll be having cold weather."

"Why, yes, that's true," said Father, "and if I can get home at noon to-day, how many helpers will I have?"

"Me!" "Me!" "ME!" the latter from John, and "Me, too!" from Mother with a smile.

Of course, Alice could not stay away while there was so much

excitement going on, so she came over to help. Father was a very comical "boss"; he wore his hat tipped over one ear and tried to speak like an Irishman. Mother and the girls cleaned up the garden and planted the bulbs, while Father and John tended to the screens and the lawn-swing and the other heavy work.

At four o'clock, Father came to Mother and asked her what next, and Mother thought and thought, and finally had to admit that there was nothing else to do. So Father said, "Guess we'll all have to go and sit on the sofa in the parlor and rest, then!"

The day before Hallowe'en, the James children were busy making pumpkin-faces out of pumpkins gathered from vines in their own garden. John took his jack-knife, cut a lid in the top, hollowed out the inside and then started on the face. Polly took the peeling knife for hers and set to work viciously. All at once, she dropped everything and screamed.

"Oh! I've cut my finger!"

Her cry startled John so that he nearly jumped out of his chair, and in so doing his knife slipped and his poor Jack had a grin from ear to ear.

"Just look at this, Polly, and see what you've done by shouting so loud. I had made up my mind to give him a sad expression and you made my knife slip and give him a grin! Gosh! What a nuisance girls are anyway!"

And he set to work to remedy the damage done. By carving a lot of teeth he was able to lessen the smiling expression a little, but still it was a smile, there was no doubt about that. Polly tied her finger up in her handkerchief and in two seconds had forgotten all about the drop of blood and was working away at her pumpkin.

"That's too bad that I had to spoil yours, Johnnie. Now just to please you, I'm going to make mine as sad as I possibly can."

"And so shall I!" shouted Ruth, hard at work on a tiny pump-kin. When they were all finished, John put the candles in and lighted them and set them in a row in the front window. The two sad ones looked very sad indeed, and John's happy one seemed to be smiling all the more and grinning from ear to ear, because the others were so sad. It was after dark when Father came home, rushing wildly up to the kitchen door.

"Let me in, let me in quick! I saw some dreadful spooks, three of them, in the front window, and they nearly frightened me to death! So I thought I'd better come in the back way!" And Ruth said, "Why, Father! Didn't you know? They're

only pumpkin faces! You mustn't be scared!"

After supper, Polly and Ruth and Alice Biddle went outside with tick-tocks, which they had made from empty spools. They visited all the neighbors and tick-tocked on the windows to frighten them. After a time the excitement wore off a little, and they began to imagine themselves staying up all night and doing mysterious things like the big boys. But Ruth began to yawn and say she was sleepy and the adventure was stopped before it began. So they consoled themselves by using their tick-tocks on the sitting-room windows and watching Father and Mother jump in their chairs.

The next morning they got up very early and rushed off at once after breakfast to explore the town and see what had happened during the night. A large crowd had gathered around Miss Chipping's wood-shed, for up on the top was Doc Johnson's lawn-swing. Mrs. Clinker's big rocker was tied up to a

telephone pole in front of the post-office. And the bench from the railway depot was found on the roof of Mr. Bowser's butchershop. Cabbages were strewn over everybody's front porch and door-step. Such mysterious things were done in the greatest secrecy in the middle of the night and no one knew who did them.

Polly and Alice were arm in arm, as usual, following the crowd around to view each successive wonder. John and his boy friends were filled with curiosity and wild guesses. Nobody wanted to even think of school, but, strange to say, when the last bell rang, they all went flying as fast as their legs could carry them.

When they came to the schoolhouse door, what should they see but the cigar store Indian at the top of the steps, smiling broadly as if to say "Good morning" to all the children, but he got a very hasty greeting from the late-comers as they rushed by. At recess he was the center of an admiring group and much conversation.

Hallowe'en was not the only important event in the James family during the month of October. Two weeks before, on the fourteenth, was Polly's birthday. When she first opened her eyes in the morning, she felt herself being pulled out of bed bodily and pummeled and thumped on the back by half-a-dozen people at once!

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, and one to grow on!" "And one to get fat on!" "And one to get skinny on!" "And an extra one for nothing!" By this time, Polly was shrieking for mercy. "Ouch! Ouch! Stop! Stop! Don't kill me! Oh, please stop!"

When Polly left for school, Mother followed her out on the

Autumn

porch and kissed her good-by. It was a lovely Indian-summer day, all red and gold and very beautiful.

129

"I'm very lucky to have such a lovely day for my birthday, don't you think so, Mother?" asked Polly.

"Indeed you are, Polly," said Mother, "and do you know it was a day exactly like this nine years ago when you were born! And every birthday you have had since then has been just as beautiful as to-day. You are a lucky girl! How does it feel to be nine, darling?"

"Well, not much different from being eight, to tell the truth, Mother!"

Polly sat at the head of the table that night at supper, with an enormous cake in front of her, with ten candles on it (one to grow on), and mysterious packages piled up around her. There were lovely blue hair-ribbons from Mother, a pencil-box from John, a little red notebook from Ruth, a beautiful box of paints from Father, and hugs all around the table and many thank-you's. By this time the candles had burned down and Polly blew them all out at once with a tremendous whiff.

Oh! to have a birthday— Candles burning bright, Eyes so blue and sparkling, Happy heart so light!





Chapter XIII HOUSE ON FIRE

CLING! Clang! House on fire!

Everybody runs to see!

Cling! Clang! Hear the bell!

Whose house can it be?

Cling! Clang! See the smoke!

Hose across the lawn!

Cling! Clang! Oh, be quick!

Pour the water on!





Chapter XIII HOUSE ON FIRE

GRAND parade was held in Greenhill when the town purchased its new hose-cart and hook-and-ladder wagon for fire protection. "Volunteer Fire Brigade of Greenhill" was painted in large letters on the wagon. Mr. Sam Smith was fire-chief, because he was retired from business and so was able to spend all his time at the fire-house. Bunny Allen, the barber, Mr. Bowser, the butcher, Mr. Watkins, who lived near the depot, and other prominent citizens made up the rest of the brigade.

These men were very brave indeed, for they had to be ready to fly, day or night, without a moment's warning, whenever the fire-bell called them. An exciting life they led, but they were stalwart men and true and never shirked their duty. Many and many a time were they roused from a bed of slumber and comfort to protect some fellow-citizen from the dangers of fire.

The fire-house was in the lower part of the town hall, and the fire-bell in the steeple up on top. A long rope reached down to the ground floor and hung just inside the door, which was always kept open, so that any one could rush up and pull it. Five dollars fine for a false alarm, though, so none of the bad boys dared to ring it just for fun. Whenever there was a fire, it rang so fast and furiously that there was no doubt at all what it meant, and the people dropped whatever they were doing and rushed out madly, to see whose house was burning up.

It was on a Saturday morning that the Simpsons' house burned down. The James family had just sat down to breakfast. Polly was taking the first bite of her poached egg when the fire-bell began. She dropped her fork and shouted, "Fire!" A minute later all three children were racing down the street, with Alice Biddle not far behind calling, "Wait for me! Wait for me!"

"What silly youngsters! Why can't they stay and finish their breakfast?" said Father.

"It's sure to be somebody's chimney burning out," said Mother. But the bell kept on ringing and people kept on running from all directions. When he finished his cup of coffee, Father said, "Why don't they stop ringing that bell?"

And Mother said, "It must be a real fire this time!"

So she took off her apron and put a shawl on her head and started out with Father and all the other people to see the fire. As they passed through the front gate, they saw smoke and flames filling the sky to the north. Mr. Norcross drove past in his spring-wagon and said, "It's the Simpsons' house!" And at that Father and Mother began to run as fast as anybody.

While they were still a block away, they could see that the whole building was in flames. The gallant members of the Fire Brigade were very black and grimy, and wet and worried looking. Some were hard at work pumping, but others stood around helplessly as if they didn't quite know what to do. The new hose was in use, but seemed to make very little impression on the roaring flames.

The yard was filled with odds and ends of furniture, some rocking chairs and lamps and bedding which had been rescued hurriedly. A few men were trying vaguely to move these to a safer

place, but there was so much confusion that nothing much was done. The fire raged and roared and the flames were whipped about in all directions by the wind.

The whole neighborhood was filled with people, people standing and sitting, and yelling and shouting; everybody offering advice which no one took; everybody lamenting and condoling and trying to guess how it had started. Some curtains fluttered out of an upstairs window and a shout of "Oh-h-!" went through the crowd as they watched the flames lick them up.

No further attempt was made to save the other furnishings, as the house was too far gone. Mrs. Simpson and Harold were sitting sadly on a soaked and blackened sofa, surrounded by a crowd of people.

"Mother," cried Harold, jumping up excitedly, "I forgot my stamp album! Let me go and get it! I can run in so quickly and I know exactly where it is. Oh, Mother, please, it's on the mantel in the sitting-room. It won't hurt me a bit. Please, Mother, please!"

"Why, Harold, of course not. You mustn't think of it."

"Oh, but, Mother, I can't lose all my precious stamps. I'm going, I've got to get it . . . " and he made a dash for the front door.

"Harold, Har-old! Come right back here! Har-old!" called Mrs. Simpson.

But Harold was too excited to hear her voice or the calls of those standing near, who suddenly realized what he was about to do. On he rushed, madly, wildly, with only one thought, "I can't let my precious stamps burn up!"

Upon the porch he leaped and in the door like a flash. A burst

of smoke and a blaze of furnace heat pushed him back for a minute. But Harold knew no stopping now, and with his hand over his eyes, choking as he went, he groped his way and stumbled on.

"Who was that?" shouted Bunny Allen, hose in hand, as he came around to the front of the house.

"Harold has gone in!" Mrs. Simpson gasped and pointed to the front door.

"Who? Harold? Where?"

"In there. Oh, please get him out!"

It took only a minute in reality, but to Harold's poor mother it seemed an eternity until Bunny Allen called the other firemen to help him, and they disappeared in the smoke. In another minute they returned, carrying an unconscious boy, with a grimy book clutched tightly in his hand.

"Get some water, somebody! He's not hurt—only fainted." In a few moments Harold opened his eyes on the broken-down sofa where they had laid him.

"Oh, Harold, darling! How could you? It's a wonder you were not burned to death!" And Mrs. Simpson took him in her arms and sobbed.

"Say, Mother, that smoke was awful! But, see, I did save my stamps, Mother, didn't I?"

By the time that Mr. and Mrs. James reached the scene, the firemen had ceased their futile efforts and given up all hope of stopping the fire. The wind had died down and everything was quiet. In the glare of the morning sun, the few red flames on the outside looked surprisingly harmless as they licked the sides

of the building. Only the density of the smoke gave evidence of the fiery furnace within.

When she heard the story, which was on every one's lips, of Harold's rescue from the burning house, Mrs. James sighed deeply and smiled.

"Yes," she said to Mrs. Clinker, "boys will be boys, as the saying goes. But what about the poor mothers?"

Mrs. James found her flock and a number of other children sitting on top of the back yard fence, waiting for the roof to fall in.

"Oh, Mother! Don't go home yet! Just wait a minute and watch it fall!" called John.

As he finished speaking, it fell with a crash.

"Hooray!" shouted the children.

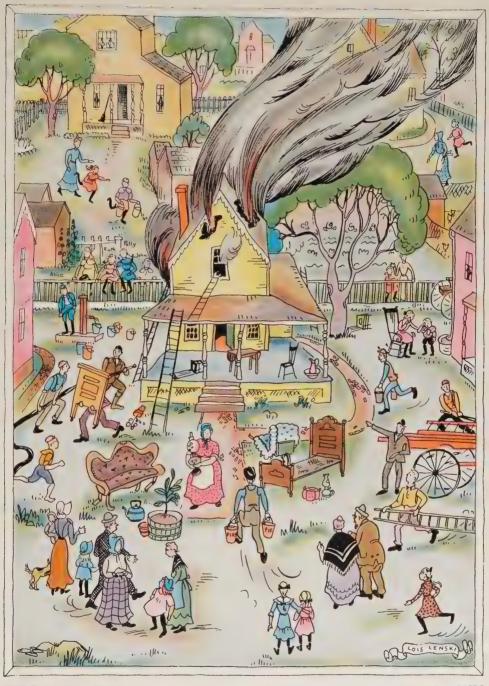
"How dreadful," exclaimed Mother. "I must go now. Don't stay too long, and John, you stay with the girls and see that they don't go too near the fire."

"All right, Mother," answered John.

All at once Polly said, "Oh, I see Ethel Simpson over there. I must go and see her. Isn't it awful for her nice house to be burning up?"

She found Ethel sitting on a blackened rocker with her little two-year-old brother, Ralph, in her arms. He was crying as loudly as he could and she could not quiet him. When Polly and Alice came up poor Ethel broke into tears too.

"Oh, Polly! What would you do if your house burned up?" And she sat down on the ground and cried and cried as if her heart would break. Polly picked up little Ralph and tried to comfort him by asking him to come to see her, and play in the



THE YARD WAS FILLED WITH ODDS AND ENDS OF FURNITURE, SOME ROCKING CHAIRS AND LAMPS AND BEDDING WHICH HAD BEEN RESCUED HURRIEDLY.



barn. But no matter what she said or did, he kept on crying louder than ever. And Ethel wouldn't show her face again, but kept on sobbing. Polly and Alice stood by awkwardly, wondering why somebody didn't do something to make things right. And Polly thought, "If only Mother were here. . . ."

But just then Mrs. Simpson, with her eyes all red, came up with Mr. Frost, who was Ethel's grandfather. He came over, lifted little Ralph up to his shoulder and took Ethel by the hand, saying, "Where's Harold?" And they all walked off toward his surrey, which stood in the road.

"I'm glad Ethel's grandfather's house is not burned up, aren't you, Alice?" said Polly on the way home.

Alice didn't answer for a minute, but then she said, "Now that her house is all burned up, do you 'spose Ethel will keep on bringing so many brand-new pencils to school?"

And Polly shook her head. "No, I don't think she will." And after a pause, "I never knew before what a terrible thing it is to have your house burn up!"

The fireman is a splendid man,

He leaves his bed at night;

He climbs the ladder with a pail

And pours with all his might!





Chapter XIV WINTER

"OVER the river and through the wood To Grandfather's house we go! The horse knows the way to carry the sleigh Through the white and drifted snow!" (Old Song)





Chapter XIV

WINTER

SUDDENLY, one morning, the little town of Greenhill woke up to find itself in the grip of winter. The mild golden days of autumn gave place to strong winds and falling snow. This happened about Thanksgiving time, and mothers rushed hurriedly to the attic and hauled out all the winter woolens from the moth-bally trunks and hung them on the line. Fathers started fires in the anthracite stoves in the sitting-rooms and closed the parlor-doors to keep them shut off for the winter. With the first fall of snow, the children tied themselves up in hoods and mufflers, dragged their sleds up from the cellar and started throwing snowballs.

Thanksgiving was a very happy time for the James family, for it meant a visit to Grandfather's in the country. Grandfather drove in to church in the morning and picked them all up afterwards in his surrey, because there wasn't room for the whole family in Mother's phaeton. Grandfather wore his big fur cap and gloves, and looked like a regular Eskimo. Father sat in front with him, holding Ruth on his lap, and Mother sat in the back seat, with Polly and John tucked in beside her. What a different ride it was from the same ride in summer! All the trees bare and black, the ground white with snow, and the houses and barns closed up tight with nobody in sight. But there was

still the same thrill of excitement in crossing the railroad and the iron bridge and coming around the bend to suddenly find the old farmhouse in sight.

Grandmother was waiting at the door and tried to take everybody into her arms at once. Just as soon as Father and Grandfather put the horse up in the stable, and came back to the house again, stamping the snow off their feet, Grandmother called, "Dinner is ready!"

And such a dinner! Turkey and cranberry sauce and all the rest, ending up with pumpkin and mince pie, the best in the world because Grandmother made it. Grandfather sat at one end and Grandmother at the other, Mother and the girls on one side and Father and John on the other. And as far as the eye could see, nothing but good things to eat.

"Well, well," said Grandfather, as he sharpened his carving knife and looked around the table with a twinkle in his eye. "Thanksgiving again! I wonder how many Thanksgiving dinners have been eaten from this old table?"

"Eleven!" said John brightly, because he knew that he had always spent all his Thanksgivings at Grandfather's.

"Wrong!" answered Grandfather. "You may go to the foot of the class, young man!"

"Hee hee! hee hee! Smarty!" laughed the girls.

"Thirty-five, anyhow, perhaps more," said Mother thoughtfully.

"Well, that's better, Mary. But not enough yet. I can remember my father making this table when I was a boy, perhaps a little older than John. It must be fifty years old, at least. Just think, more than fifty Thanksgiving dinners have been eaten

from this old table, and it's still as strong as it was fifty years ago!"

By this time the plates were well filled and everybody was busy. "We mustn't forget to tell what we're thankful for," said Grandmother softly. "I'll be first. I'm thankful that I'm well and strong and am able to have my dear ones with me for Thanksgiving!"

Grandfather cleared his throat and said, "Wal, I'm thankful that cow, Sukey o' mine, didn't get sick an' die, like I thought she would. And I'm thankful I've got such good whiskers to tickle young ladies with!"

"Oh, Grandfather, you are so funny!" giggled Ruth. "Now, Father, you're next."

Father grew very thoughtful and frowned for a long time before he spoke.

"Well, I'm thankful I don't have to eat all those fifty-'leven Thanksgiving dinners that Grandfather was talking about. One is quite enough for me!"

Then Mother, "Well, I'm thankful that my children are not as bad as they might be! . . . No! that's not all. I'm thankful for many, many other things too numerous to mention!"



John came next in order. "I'm thankful for finding my peachy knife after I lost it the other day!"

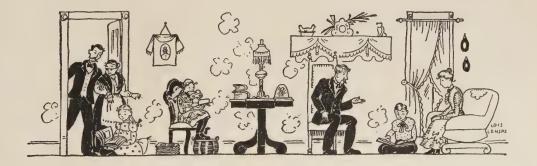
Then Polly, with lowered eyes and blushing cheek, "I'm thankful to be the best one in my class at school."

Ruth was the youngest and last, "Oh, dear," she cried, "there are millions and millions of things that I'm thankful for, but I can't tell them all. Guess I'll just say that I'm thankful I'm me!"

And then, how they all laughed!

After dinner Mother and the girls helped Grandmother wash the dishes, and then they popped corn on the kitchen stove. Polly made some syrup for it and they stuck it together in balls, and Ruth carried a whole dishpanful into the sitting-room, where Father and Mother and Grandfather and Grandmother were having a good talk around the stove. But, somehow, no one was able to eat very much of it, so Grandmother put it all in a big paper sack for the girls to take home.

Then they all went into the parlor for the rest of the afternoon. Polly and Ruth dearly loved to see the albums on the marble-topped table, filled with curious photographs of Mother when she was a little girl, leaning her arm on a table, or sitting



stiffly on Grandfather's knee. Besides the albums, with their plush covers and letters in gold, there were two other interesting books on the lower shelf of the table, a wonderful large red book filled with exciting pictures of the Galveston flood and an enormous shiny black Bible that contained the family record of births and deaths.

On the top of the table was Grandmother's precious lamp with the tinkling glass ornaments around the shade. Near by under a glass cover was a bouquet of brightly colored wool flowers which Grandmother had made when she was a little girl. On the wall was her sampler, with her name, Sarah Wetherington, aged seven, at the bottom. Polly and Ruth always looked at it with awe and tried in vain to imagine dear old Grandmother as a little girl of seven. But the nicest things of all were the china hen at one end of the mantel, and the china cat at the other, both so precious that Grandmother had never allowed the girls to touch them.

The girls settled themselves in chairs by the table, and spent a happy half-hour looking at Grandmother's stereopticon views. All at once Father looked at his watch and said it was time to start for home. No one could imagine where the afternoon had flown.

"It seems as if we had only just come!" said Polly.

"The days are drawing in," said Grandmother. "That's why it gets dark so early, dear."

"Come along, chickens, bundle up in your things. We don't want to let the fires go out at home, as cold as it is." And Mother proceeded to help button coats and fasten up arctics.

It was too cold for Grandmother to come out on the porch,

so she waved good-by from the window until the surrey disappeared in the distance.

The Thanksgiving snow proved to be a very light one, and not until much later in the winter was Greenhill favored with a heavier snowfall. It began in the early evening, so quietly and gently that hardly any one realized that it was snowing. By morning it was six inches deep and everybody got their shovels out and got to work. It kept right on until night and when it finally stopped it was about a foot deep, and more shoveling and sweeping had to be done. All the children were delighted because so much snow meant real coasting at last.

Watkins road at the other end of the town was very steep, so it was ideal for coasting. Every day after school it was crowded with boys and girls of all ages and sizes. John had a little low coaster, and Ruth and Polly had a real girl's sled, with a horse's head painted on the top. The Watkins hill was quite a long way from the Jameses' house, so the easiest and quickest way to get there was to hitch on behind a wagon or a surrey and get a free ride. Teams were too slow, because the horses walked all the way, and sleighs were too fast and were apt to tip you over.

One Saturday, Polly was out with her sled and she hitched on behind a buggy which was driving slowly through Main Street. All at once the man started to whip up his horse and Polly had to hold tight to keep from falling off.

"Oh! this is fun! Now I know what it feels like to go fast!" and she held on for dear life. "Only I hope he'll slow up before we go too far."

But the strange man did not slow up. He kept on whipping

his horse and shouting, "Giddap! Giddap!" as if he were deliberately trying to frighten the little girl who was trailing behind. Pretty soon Polly began to be frightened.

"Oh, I must let go before we come to that next hill!"

And at that she let go of her rope, gripping the sides of the sled tightly. But instead of being gently left behind, she was jerked and thrown roughly into the snow. Not until she jumped up did she realize what had happened. The rope of her sled had caught on the buggy and it was being carried quickly away from her, for the man was still whipping up his horse and driving as fast as he could.

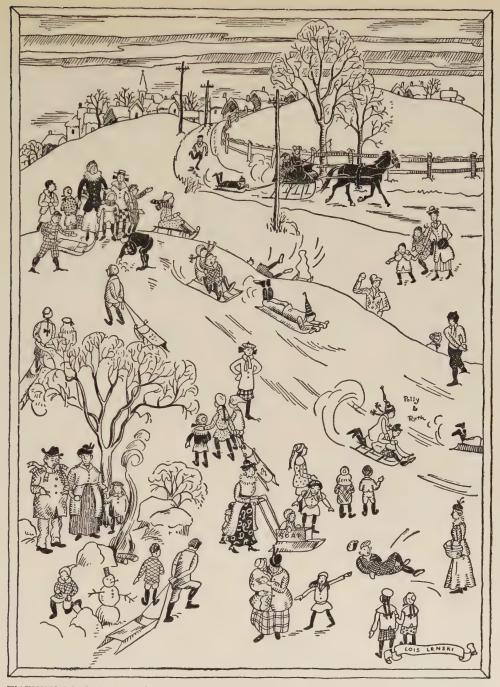
Polly's first impulse was to run after the buggy and try to rescue her sled, but she soon saw that was useless. It was with a sinking feeling in her heart and eyes wet with tears that she watched her precious sled disappear in the distance. After that there was nothing to do but to go home.

"How can I ever tell Ruth? The sled's half hers, too, and what will she say when she hears that I have lost it?"

A very unhappy and sorrowful little girl came quietly in through the side door. The whole family was at supper, and she managed to tell her story without crying.

"Well, dear, don't worry about it now," said Mother. "Come and eat your supper. Perhaps the man will bring it back. He probably never knew that you were hitched on at all. Perhaps he was hurrying for some other reason."

Just as Polly finished eating, a knock was heard at the door. And there stood Nancy Jones with Polly's sled! It was almost too good to be true. And then Nancy explained that she and a crowd of the older boys and girls had taken a long hitch about



WATKINS ROAD AT THE OTHER END OF THE TOWN WAS VERY STEEP, SO IT WAS IDEAL FOR COASTING.



five miles in the country and had had to walk back. On the way, they met a buggy coming along slowly, driven by a man who appeared to be sound asleep. Just as they passed, Nancy happened to see a sled hooked on behind, and she followed it to see if she knew whose it was. At once she knew it was Polly's, so she unhooked it and brought it back with her. When Polly tried to thank her she wouldn't listen, but said, "That's nothing," and slipped off in the dark.

"Oh, Ruth, I'm so glad!" said Polly. "Now you can have your half back again!"

Out by the side porch Ruth built a wonderful snowman. Three huge balls of snow rolled up and set on top of each other, the top one smaller for a head, a tin can for a hat, pieces of coal for eyes, nose, mouth, and coat buttons and sticks for arms. He was just as tall as she was, and made very pleasant company for all sorts of games. The whole family ransacked their brains to find an appropriate name for so important and dignified a personage. Finally Mother hit upon it.

"He's the very picture of Mister Micawber, judging from the jaunty way he wears his hat!"

"Well," said Ruth, "I'm sure I've never made the acquaintance of Mister Macawber, but I like the sound of his name, so that's what we'll call him."

And Mister Micawber proved himself a very optimistic friend of the family, wearing his hat jauntily, smiling broadly, and always, like his namesake, looking for something to turn up! He stayed for more than a month, lasting fully a week after the snow had gone, still smiling away. Finally he melted, bit by

bit, and gradually lost his various members and disappeared from sight. So that was the end of the snow and the end of Mister Micawber!

But it was not the end of the fun. For just after the thaw which melted all the snow, it began to freeze, and it kept on freezing until there was four inches of ice on the lumber pond. So the fun was transferred from Watkins Hill to the pond, and skating took the place of coasting. As soon as school was out all the children made a dash for the pond, with skates dangling over their shoulders.

The big boys played hockey with sticks which they had made themselves. They flew over the ice at such a terrific speed that they frightened the little girls nearly out of their wits, and made them stay down at one end in a little bay where the boys were not apt to come. Alice Biddle had a pair of brand-new skates that she was very proud of, but, poor thing, she could hardly stand up on them. Polly and Ruth had an old pair between them and had to take turns using them. They usually brought their sled along, too, so that the one who was not skating could slide around on the sled. The boys built a big bonfire on the bank and whenever anybody got too cold, he could go to the fire and get warmed up. Poor Alice got so discouraged with her attempts to learn that she spent most of her time sitting on a stone near the fire.

After a while Ethel Simpson and Mildred Brown came up.

"Oh, girls," called Polly, "let's all hold hands and take Alice in the middle and play 'Crack the Whip'!"

"But I'm afraid that you'll let go of me and I'll fall," said Alice tearfully.

"Nonsense, come along," said Mildred. "It's the best way for you to learn to skate."

So helpless Alice was put in the middle, and Mildred took the lead, as she was the best skater, and away they flew over the pond. When they reached the middle, Mildred stopped, braced herself, and cracked the whip, sending the other girls flying in all directions. Poor Alice was all right until the critical moment, and then she lost her head and got scared, and down she went, pulling Ethel and Polly down on top of her.

But her courage was aroused and she came up smiling.

"Oh, say, that was fun, let's do it again!"

After a half-dozen trials, she found that she could keep her ankles stiff even through the vicious "cracking." And after that she began to take strokes with the other girls when they started out, and almost before she knew it, she was skating! And then how proud she was!

Good-day, Mr. Snowman, how do you do? How do you like your hat so new? Your arms of wood and your shiny black eyes Are surely enough to take the prize!





Chapter XV CHRISTMAS

HAT will you get for Christmas?

Candy and games and toys?

These are the things old Santa brings

To all good girls and boys.

What will you get for Christmas?
A switch so limber and thin?
Don't you suppose old Santa knows
How naughty you have been?





Chapter XV CHRISTMAS

REPARATIONS for Christmas in the little town of Greenhill started weeks beforehand. The children began to practise Christmas hymns in Sunday-school, and took their "pieces" home to learn. Mothers started to dress dolls and knit mufflers in the long winter evenings after the children had gone to bed. Fathers tried to manufacture book-shelves or shirtwaist-boxes secretly in the woodshed, and had hard work thinking up answers to throw their wives off the track when they insisted upon knowing what all that pounding was for. everybody had to act entirely innocent of all the preparations going on all about them so secretly. As the weeks and days rolled by, and the time grew shorter and shorter, the little children began to think hard of all the things they wanted, wrote their letters to Santa Claus, and wondered how he could possibly get down the chimney and come out through the stove with a pack on his back!

About a week before Christmas, Mrs. James suddenly realized that she had not done half her Christmas shopping, so hurried off excitedly, leaving the housework to take care of itself. Mr. James brought home holly wreaths for the windows and hid the Christmas-tree in the woodshed behind a pile of wood. School was dismissed with an elaborate program which consisted of much

speaking of pieces, singing of songs, and concluded with an elaborate "tableau" by the high school. Each teacher got her desk piled high with presents, and each pupil was sent home with a "Merry Christmas" and an orange in his pocket.

For days Ruth never tired of asking questions. "How many more days until Christmas? How can he ever come through the chimney? Won't he get burned up when he comes out through the stove? Do you think he will bring me a pair of skates if I'm very, very good? And a doll-buggy, and a new doll with light hair and blue eyes? And— And—"

"Well," said Polly, "if I were you, I would write that letter to Santa Claus and send it up the chimney, so he will get it in time."

"But I don't know how to address it," said Ruth. "How do I know where Santa Claus lives?"

"Oh, why you just address it in care of the North Pole, silly! Everybody knows that."

Ruth borrowed a pencil from Father and so, with Polly's help and advice, the important letter was written:

"Dere Santy Cloos, I want a pare of skats and a dolly baby bugy and a nu doll with lite hare and blew eyes and a bed and sum red hare-ribbens and a doll hous and sum dishes and enything else you wud lik to bring me and I am allwys very gud so dont furget yure frend Ruth James."

And on the outside she wrote painstakingly:

"To Santy Cloos at the north pol form Ruth James."

"There now, it's all ready," said Polly. "Here! I'll open the stove-door, and you put it in. You'll have to throw it in way high up so that it will go up the chimney with the smoke, and not get burned up in the flames."

"Oh, no!" said Ruth, "I don't think I will just now. No! I said I'm not going to, Polly! So you might as well close up the stove-door and be done with it! No! I don't want to!" And she hugged her letter tight.

"All right, then," said Polly, "I'm sure I don't care what you do with it."

Ruth went over to the table where she had been writing and started to clear up her things, ready for bed. When she went to kiss Father and Mother good-night, she slipped Father's pencil into his vest-pocket, saying, "Thank you for your pencil, Father." And nobody noticed the white slip of paper tightly rolled around the pencil.

After the children had all gone to bed, Father pulled out his pencil to do some writing, and Ruth's letter fell into his hands.

"Hello, what's this? 'To Santy Cloos at the north pol form Ruth James'! Mary, look at this! Here's Ruth's letter to Santa Claus in my pocket! I see now why she didn't want it to go in the stove and be burned up. Wise little Ruth!"

And Father and Mother had a good laugh to themselves.

For two or three days before Christmas, Mother was busy in the kitchen baking up all sorts of good things which filled the house with Christmassy smells. The time seemed to crawl by inches in the minds of the children, and they could hardly believe it when "the day before" arrived. With it came tingling Christmas 157

cold weather, and Grandfather and Grandmother in furs to spend the night and all the next day.

After supper it was Christmas Eve, and they all dressed up in their Sunday clothes and went to church to the special children's service. The church was very beautiful, with a tall tree that reached to the ceiling all decorated with gaily-colored balls and candles and a great big star on the top. And all the well-known faces looked different, as if transfigured by the Christmas light. At the close, after all the hymns had been sung and the pieces spoken, Mr. Norcross and the Reverend Mr. Brown passed boxes of candy and books to each child, and they all went home filled with happiness.

As soon as they reached home, Mother and Grandmother shooed the children off to bed. The only way that Mother could quiet them was to tell them that the sooner they went to sleep, the sooner morning would come. Finally they tumbled in. Ruth decided to stay awake all night to see what would happen, so she lay wide-eyed for a long time. But she dropped off just about the time that queer bumping noises were heard coming from the sitting-room. And then she was too far off in the land of dreams to wonder what they were.

Early in the morning, Polly woke up. She reached over and shook Ruth.

"Ruth, come on, it's Christmas! Let's go see if Santa has been here."

Ruth was up in a minute and they slipped on their bathrobes and slippers and went tiptoeing down the stairs. When they were about half-way down, Polly stepped on a board that creaked.

"Who's there?" called Father immediately, from the bedroom at the foot of the stairs.

"It isn't any burglar, Father," said Polly meekly. "It's just us, coming down to see what we got for Christmas."

"Heavens! Do you know what time it is? It's only two o'clock! You go straight back to bed and go to sleep and don't get up until daylight."

"Oh-h, Father!" And two disappointed little girls retraced their steps.

"There's no use sleeping any more," said Polly. "I'm just going to stay awake until it gets light and then I'll call you."

Ruth dropped off at once, and it wasn't ten minutes until Polly did the same in spite of her intentions. About five o'clock the girls were wakened by a shout, and there was John at the door in his pajamas!

"Hey, you sleepy-heads! Come on, it's Christmas!"

And Ruth said, "Do you think we'd better, Polly? It isn't light yet."

And Polly said, "Well, it's nearly light! Let's try it again very quietly. I'll try not to step on that squeaky board this time and perhaps Father won't wake up."

So down they went. At the first sight of the sitting-room they forgot all caution and began to shout.

"Oh! look here!" "Look what I've got!" "I'm sure this is for me!" "Isn't this lovely!" "Oh, Polly, see my new doll!!!"

The din was enough to waken Father and Mother, of course. Father wanted to send them back to bed again, but Mother said, "Oh, let them stay up!" And the excitement became so great

Christmas 159

that she and Father and Grandmother and Grandfather all had to get dressed and come in and see the fun. Grandfather lighted the candles on the tree, and everybody loved the little manger scene beneath, with Mary and the Baby in a little stable and the animals standing in the snow outside. Mother played the piano and they all joined in the old favorite hymns, and after that they were all very busy examining and playing with the gifts and toys.

Father was the gayest one of the party. He stuck Polly's new stocking cap on the top of his head, tied John's muffler around his neck, put on Grandfather's new driving gloves and pranced around, wheeling Ruth's new blond doll in the new baby-buggy! The children started after him and they soon had him down on all fours, carrying them all on his back, except the ones who tumbled off! And Grandmother took Grandfather by the arm and started dancing a jig with him, so it was no wonder that poor Mother couldn't induce any of them to come and eat their breakfast.

Old Santa is an active man,

He slides down chimneys black,

Fills stockings while his reindeer wait,

And then goes climbing back!





Chapter XVI THE KITCHEN

THE kitchen is a pleasant place,
With pots and pans galore;
It has a stove of shining black,
A broom behind the door.

The kitchen is a lovely place,
With jam upon a shelf;
And loads of cookies in a jar,
Where you can help yourself!





Chapter XVI THE KITCHEN

Polly and Ruth loved the kitchen more than any other room in the house. It was big and roomy, with an enormous black stove and a wood-box and coal-bucket. There was a stove-lifter to lift the lids off with, a poker to poke the fire with, and a shaker to shake down the ashes with. At one side of the stove was the big clothes-rack. On the mantel was the alarm clock, which spent its life waking people up, timing eggs and keeping cakes from getting burned. In one corner was a pantry for pots and pans and all sorts of supplies. Near the window there was a sink and an iron pump for rain-water. The pump for well-water was out on the back porch. Last of all, there was a table in the middle of the room and a rocker with a cushion by the window, where Mother could sit and look out of the window, when she was tired, or while she was waiting for something to cook.

One snowy, blowy afternoon Polly and Ruth came home from school with rosy cheeks and sparkling eyes. The minute they opened the front door they both began to sniff.

"What do I smell?" asked Ruth. "It's not onions or cabbage, because they smell dreadful. It isn't prunes, is it?"

"I should say not!" declared Polly emphatically. "It's some kind of cake. I'm going to hurry up and find out."

As she spoke she threw off her wraps and ran to the kitchen. "It smells like cookies to me!"

Sure enough, there was Mother at the table with a big mixing bowl. There was a big fire in the range and the kitchen was as warm as could be. The girls put on their aprons and took their places on chairs, one at each end of the table to watch. Polly glanced in the mixing bowl and saw that it was empty.

"Why, it's not cookies! But I was sure that I smelled them the minute I came in the house," exclaimed Polly.

"So did I," chimed in Ruth. "Where are they, Mother?"

Mother smiled, and went to the oven and peeped in mysteriously. "Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies," she said, with a twinkle in her eyes. "I'll tell you this much. It isn't cookies, because I knew you'd want to help with them and I waited until you came home."

As she spoke she went to the oven and took out two large squares of gingerbread, which the girls viewed with longing.

"Now we'll start on the cookies," said Mother.

"Oh, goody, goody," cried Ruth, clapping her hands.

In a moment, the kitchen resounded with the noise of the eggbeater and the chopping bowl, followed by the whizzing of the flour-sifter. In another moment, Mother was beating everything together vigorously.

The dough was nice and stiff and looked so good that the girls each had to have a taste. Then Mother rolled the mixture out very thin, and Polly and Ruth took turns using the cookiecutter, cutting out ever so many beautiful cookies with crinkly edges. Sometimes the scraps were so tiny, they had to be nibbled up! Then Mother put pan after pan into the oven, and after

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careful watching, out came a whole crockful of the loveliest brown cookies in the world.

"Oh, Mother, may we please have a taste, just one apiece?" begged Polly.

"And one for you, too, Mother?" added Ruth.

"And couldn't I take just one to John?"

"And how about me? Can't I have 'just one,' too?" asked Father, poking his head in at the kitchen-door.

"I suppose you may as well eat them one time as well as another," sighed Mother, as she sat down in her rocker. "When they are gone, they're gone!"

"Oh, you mean 'when they're gone, we'll make some more,' don't you?" asked Father.

"You know they're not half so good after they get cold as they are when they're warm from the oven. Are they, Father?" asked Polly.

"No sir-ee," agreed Father. "There is nothing in this world so good as a cookie warm from the oven, especially when Mother made it." And he pulled one of the little curls nestling in the curve of Mother's neck.

"That's all very well," said Mother, "but I never noticed any one in this family refusing the cold ones!"

"You shouldn't make them so good, Mother," said Ruth.

Soon it was time to get supper, and Ruth had to chase Father out of the kitchen because it was too crowded.

"Oh, do please let me stay. I want to grind the coffee," begged Father.

"No, you can't. I'm going to," said Ruth, as she closed the door behind him.

"Oh, no, you're not," exclaimed Polly, "because I got it first. Didn't I, Mother?"

"But I said so first," shouted Ruth. And she grabbed the coffee-grinder away from Polly.

The poor old coffee-grinder was in danger of being pulled to pieces, when all at once the drawer slipped out and the whole thing fell to the floor, and coffee beans were spilled far and wide. Just then John came in and said, "Who's been spilling coffee all over the floor? May I grind the coffee, Mother?"

So John sat down and turned the handle triumphantly while two little girls picked up coffee from the floor.

"I'm going to set the table, Mother, may I?" announced Ruth as soon as she rose from the floor. "And I'm going to get everything on this time, I'm sure, and not forget half the things like Polly does!"

"Very well, go ahead," answered Polly. "Nobody cares what you do. I'm going to time the eggs, 'cause Mother promised me last night that I could."

Ruth climbed up on a chair and carefully took down the cups and saucers and plates from the cupboard. Then she laid the silver and put all the dishes on the table. In the meantime, Mother and Polly were busy in the kitchen. Polly's task, though so simple and so short,—only three minutes,—seemed to take more time and energy than that of the others combined.

First she put a pan of water on the stove to boil. Then she went to the wire basket in the pantry and counted out her eggs, "two for Father, and one for Mother, who doesn't want two because she doesn't want to get tired of them; one for John, who

probably would like to have two but can't; and one for me and one for Ruth, and I guess one's enough for little girls like us."

She ran to the stove and took off the lid, but the water hadn't started to bubble yet.

"I'll cut the bread for you, Ruth, if you want me to," she suggested, and went to the bread-box.

"Well, be sure you cut it straight," answered Ruth. "Just pretend you're sawing and it will go much straighter."

"Oh, no, you don't saw at all, you just cut!" said Polly, "I've watched Mother millions of times."

"Well, but then, what are the saw-teeth for, I'd like to know?" asked Ruth.

"They must be for ornament."

Just then a loud hiss was heard on the stove behind, and Polly jumped to see the cover of her pan bubbling in the air and the water spilling all over the stove.

"Oh, Mother, come quick!" called Polly. "How can I ever do my eggs? If I put them in now, they'll boil all over the stove! What shall I do? You said the water had to be boiling."

Mother came to the rescue and moved the pan to the back part of the stove and showed Polly how to put each egg in carefully so it would not break. Then Polly moved the pan up to the hot part of the stove and watched the water begin to boil again.

As soon as she saw the first bubble, she looked at the alarm clock and saw that the big hand was pointing to nine. She climbed up on a chair and took the clock down from the mantel, set it on the table, and pulled up a chair to watch it. The three

minutes seemed as long as three hours, and the big hand crawled so slowly she felt sure the clock had stopped. To make matters worse, John came out, and he and Ruth and Mother all stood and watched and waited. And Father called, "Isn't supper ready yet? I'm so hungry I could eat the house up."

At last the eggs were done. And when John tasted his, he said, "You might know Polly would get it too hard!" And Father was so surprised to find that the extra one was for him. And Ruth forgot the salt and pepper, as usual, and had to jump up and get them.

When Father got up from the supper table he said, "Any new selections at the dish-washing concert to-night?"

And Polly answered, "Stop your teasing, Father, or we won't sing at all for you."

Polly did the washing and Ruth did the drying. While the dishes flew back and forth, the kitchen resounded with bursts of song. Polly chose, "I'm a Gypsy," so they sang that first.

"I'm a gypsy! I'm a gypsy!

Oh, I am a little gypsy girl!

The forest is my home and there I love to roam,

For I am a little gypsy girl!" (Old Song)



The next song was Ruth's choice:

"Po-or pussy! .Po—or pussy!
Sitting so cozy, close to the fire!
Pleasant purring, pretty pussy,
Frisky, full of fun and fussy,
Mortal foe of mouse and rat!
Oh, how I love the old black cat!"
(Old Song.)

They sang a number of other school songs until their throats were tired, and then began their favorite game.

"I've got a word that rhymes with 'cat,' " said Ruth.

"Is it an animal with a long tail that gnaws things?" asked Polly?

"No, it isn't 'rat,' " said Ruth.

"Is it something you use when you play baseball?" asked Polly.

"No, it isn't 'bat,' " said Ruth.

"Is it what you are when you are not thin?" asked Polly.

"Yes, it is 'fat,' " said Ruth. And then it was Polly's turn to think of a word and Ruth's turn to guess. And so, instead of finding it hard work to wash the dishes, it became the greatest fun. And the dishes seemed to almost wash themselves.

One Wednesday afternoon when Ruth came home from school she found that Mother had gone to a meeting of the Sewing Circle at Mrs. Jones's house. Polly ran over to Alice Biddle's and John was outside playing with Dicky Clinker. So Ruth decided she would like to bake a cake for a surprise for Mother. She put on Mother's big apron, and got out the biggest cook-book. She opened it up in the middle, spread it out on the table and

pretended to read it with a very important air. She got out the big mixing-bowl, the egg-beater, the rolling-pin and the cookie-cutter and set to work.

"Let me see now. First sugar, and then eggs! I'm going to make my cake most delicious so I'll use lots of good things."

She poured enough sugar into the bowl to fill it half-full, and then brought out the basket of eggs. She picked one up, knocked it gently on the side of the bowl, as she remembered seeing Mother do, but when she came to open it, the whole shell went to pieces in her hands and the poor cake was nearly ruined before it was begun. But she fished out the pieces of shell carefully and picked up another egg.

"I think that was a *soft* shell," she murmured to herself. "The next one will be easier."

Sure enough, the next one slipped out of its shell very neatly, and Ruth was so pleased about it, that she kept on breaking and breaking eggs. It was such fun to crack the shell and watch them slip out that almost before she realized it the egg-basket was empty. She looked at her mixture critically.

"Well, it looks like a lot of eggs, but then I want my cake 'specially good and 'specially large. Now let me see, what's next? Oh, yes, cinnamon and things like that!"

So she went to the cupboard and filled her hands with spice-boxes, including salt and pepper, and gave her cake a "dash" of each. She took the bottle of vanilla and started to pour in a generous amount, when she heard Polly calling her from the yard.

"Oh, Ruth, come quick. Mrs. Biddle has made some taffy and wants us to come and help Alice pull it!"

"Taffy!" said Ruth. "Oh, goody! I'll just put my cake away and finish it when I get back." So she put her big mixing bowl into the lower part of the cupboard and ran.

The excitement of pulling taffy was so great that all thoughts of the precious cake vanished from her mind, and when Mother came home, she heard nothing but a great deal of chatter about the Biddles and their taffy. She was surprised to see the rolling-pin and egg-beater on the kitchen table and wondered how they got there, but did not give the matter much thought. It was not until she opened the lower door of the cupboard to get a kettle, that she saw the mixing bowl and its mysterious mixture.

"What on earth is this?" she called in great surprise.

"Polly, Father, John, all of you, come here and see what I have found," and they all came running,—all but Ruth, who ran upstairs and hid in a closet.

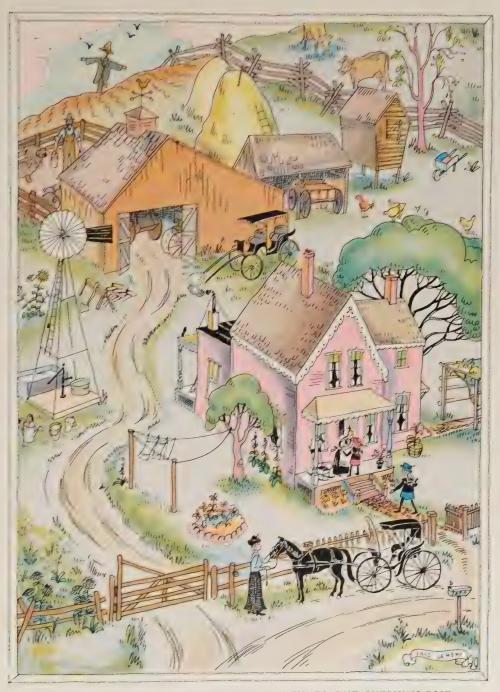
"It must have been Ruth trying to make something," said Polly. "I know she was in the kitchen when I called her to go over to Alice's."

"Well, well! What can the poor child have been thinking of, anyhow?" asked Mother. "There's sugar and eggs and spices. I suppose it's her idea of a cake, though I should think she would have known better, she has watched me so many times!"

"And look how many eggs she used!" said John. "There must be more than a dozen. Whe-ew!"

And Father said he thought she ought to have lessons in cooking if she was as interested as that.

And Mother said that would come soon enough, but what on earth could she do with that awful mixture, because it would be wasteful to throw it away.



BEFORE MOTHER HAD TIME TO TIE PET UP TO THE HITCHING-POST POLLY AND RUTH WERE IN GRANDMOTHER'S ARMS.



Oh-ho for bread with butter thick,
And jelly spread on top!

(For curly hair, be sure to eat
The crust before you stop!)

Oh-ho for puddings, sauce and all, And cakes with frosting thick! Oh-ho for pies in slices wide And mixing bowls to lick!

Oh-ho for dishes stacked up high, And towels trimmed with blue! Oh-ho for 'normous dishpans round, And splashing soap-suds, too!





Chapter XVII MAIL-TIME

BIG, long letters for Father,
Pale, smelly ones for Mother,
Fat, bulgy ones for Sister,
Nothing at all for Brother,
But a Valentine red for
ME!





Chapter XVII MAIL-TIME

HE town of Greenhill was a very quiet place. The people who lived there were quite content to stay at home and very few of them went traveling. Occasionally a traveling man got off on a train and those who noticed him wondered idly what he was selling. Once in a while a train stopped to let off a visitor, and sometimes a new family arrived with bag and baggage.

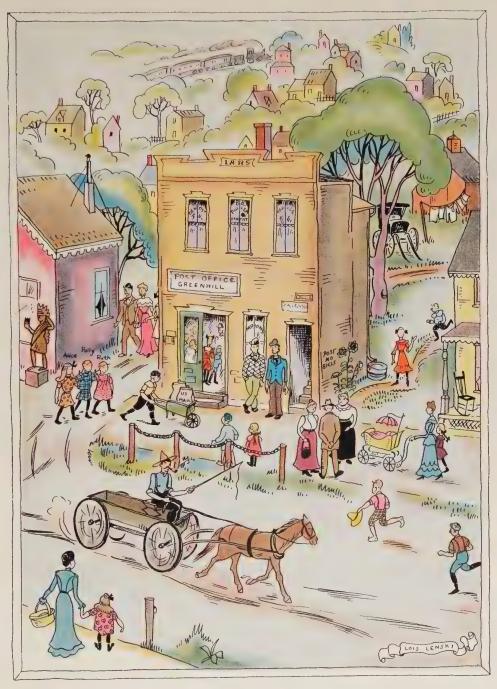
But the most important thing about the train was the fact that it brought the mail. Everybody watched for the fivethirty-two and tried to be on hand at the post-office a few minutes later.

Polly and Ruth started out early one evening, and Mother told them to be sure and be back before dark. As they went out the gate, Alice saw them and came running along to join them. They walked down the street arm in arm.

"I wish I'd get a million letters," said Alice. "Don't you?"

"I don't," said Ruth. "It would take too long to read them all. 'Bout a dozen; that's all I want!"

Just then the loud whistle of the approaching train was heard and the girls ran as fast as they could in the direction of the depot. They got there just in time to see the mail bag fly whizzing through the air from the rapidly moving train. It landed in a pile of weeds a long distance down the tracks.



IN ANOTHER MOMENT, FRANK ARRIVED, BREATHLESS, WITH THE MAIL BAGS.



Mail-Time 175

Tom Murphy was station-master and was supposed to take care of the mail bags. But, as usual, he was too busy gossiping with a friend. So he called to Frank Jones, who was standing near:

"Hey, there, Bud! See that mail bag? Run and get it and wheel it up to the post-office in that wheel barrer, will yuh?"

Frank did not need much coaxing, for to wheel the mail bags up to the post-office was a great honor in the eyes of all the boys in town.

Polly and Alice and Ruth followed at his heels.

"Got any letters for me, Frank?" "Hurry up, Frank, I want my mail!" "Don't be so poky, Frank!"

"Aw, keep still, can't you? I'm not the postmaster. Who d'ye think you're talkin' to, anyway?"

Mr. Jackson, the postmaster, had a long neck and a large nose. He had a small notion counter in the back of the post-office and sold thread and needles and ribbons and some goods by the yard.

Jerry Cooper and Grandpa Adams were sitting by the stove keeping him company, when the crowd began to arrive. Nancy Jones and Ethel Simpson were first; then came Mrs. Jenkins with the twins in their buggy, one at the head and the other at the foot; and soon after several other women and children.

Mr. Jackson was always much annoyed when the people began coming so early, long before it was time for the train. He liked to pretend that they had come to buy something, although he knew very well that they hadn't. So he walked up to Mrs. Jenkins and asked, "What can I do for you to-day?"

"Oh, nothing, thank you, we're just waiting for the mail."

At that Mr. Jackson pulled out his big silver watch, took a good look at it and walked away, shaking his head in disgust, to resume his seat by the stove.

Doc Johnson came in and nodded his head and grunted once or twice. Little Ralph Simpson came in, his mouth and hands full of cookies. A farmer with his hat on the back of his head came in whistling. Two women, some children; still they came, all laughing and talking. It was almost as if a party were being held at the post-office, so many friendly happy people were there.

A murmur of anticipation ran through the crowd as the whistle of the five-thirty-two sounded in the distance. Several children ran out on the sidewalk to watch the train go whizzing past the crossing, a block away. In another moment, Frank arrived breathless, with the mail bag, Polly and Alice and Ruth and other children at his heels.

Mr. Jackson never allowed himself to be flurried or flustered by anything, least of all by the arrival of the mail. When Frank appeared, he slowly and deliberately left his seat by the stove and took the bag inside his coop. Then he slowly and deliberately adjusted his spectacles, coughed a few times, as if to make an impression on the waiting audience outside, closed the two little wooden doors, and slowly and deliberately proceeded to unlock the bag. Then he took his own good time to distribute letters, papers and parcels.

The conversation dwindled to a murmur and the people watched and waited eagerly. Their eyes followed Mr. Jackson's movements through the glass fronts of the boxes, and occasional remarks were heard, "There's something for me!" "Won-

Mail-Time 177

der what it can be!" "There's Miss Chipping's paper!"
"Whose box is that, I wonder? They've got four letters!"

Polly kept her eyes on Box No. 3 and Alice on No. 17 in the row directly underneath. Ruth stood by the baby buggy and amused Mrs. Jenkins' twins. Doc Johnson had a lock-box and each time something was put in his box he stepped up, worked the combination and took it out, while all the children looked on in admiration.

The crowd grew silent, so interested was every one in watching. Suddenly Ralph Simpson screamed and Ethel, his sister, ran to see what was the matter.

"Frank Jones stole one of my cookies and I'm goin' to tell my mother on him," he cried. Ethel tried her best to hush him up, but the more she tried, the more noise he made. So she gave up in despair and took him out the front door and sent him home.

It seemed a long wait, but it could not have been more than fifteen minutes when the little doors were opened with a snap, and Frank Jones, who was standing nearest, asked for his mail.

Old Mr. Snell, who was nearly ninety, stepped up for his newspaper, and P. W. Jones got some hardware advertisements.



Mildred Brown got a big pile because her father was the preacher. Miss Chipping stepped up for her paper, Farm and Fireside, and after she turned it over several times, asked, "Is that all? Are you sure?" Bunny Allen, the barber, usually got a letter from his married daughter once a week on Tuesdays, so he came in and asked for it, and when Mr. Jackson said no, he said, "There ought to be one! Can't understand that! Guess Sally must have been too busy to write." Mrs. Jenkins was lucky and got a letter from her brother in California and read it all the way home. Several people got their daily newspapers, but most of the others were disappointed and got nothing.

As soon as the mail was handed out, the crowd began to scatter. One by one, or two or three together, they ambled slowly down the street, the fortunate ones absorbed in reading their mail, and the others still laughing and chattering. Polly and Alice and Ruth were the last ones to come out before Mr. Jackson locked the door and went home to supper. They came out slowly and walked down the street arm in arm.

And soon all the people were back in their homes again and it began to grow dark in Greenhill.

The friendly old fat sun went to bed in the west, with a smile on his face, and left the town bathed in a rosy glow. And all the little houses stood silent in the dusk. Smoke rose gently from the tall red chimneys and disappeared in the darkness of the sky. The hoof beats of a horse and the rumble of a wagon echoed through the quiet street. A mother called her child from the side porch. A man and a woman walked along the street arm in arm. The voice of a crying baby sounded from an upstairs window. Mothers settled down in their easy

Mail-Time 179

chairs by the lamp with a lapful of stockings to darn. Fathers adjusted their spectacles and settled down to read the evening paper. The leaves on the trees trembled and fluttered, shaken by a passing breeze.

One by one the lamps were lighted in the houses. One by one the stars came out in the sky. And all the lights twinkled together.



THE END





